

**THE ACTOR AS DRAMATIST**  
**A STUDY OF THE PLAYS OF JOHN OSBORNE**

David Smith

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines John Osborne's work in the light of his experiences in the theatre prior to his rise to fame as a dramatist and also as a working actor during the greater part of his career as a dramatist. The thesis deals with Osborne's work both for the theatre and for television, but excludes those texts which have been published but remain as yet unperformed. It concentrates upon his original plays and with the exception of A Bond Honoured it does not discuss his adaptations of the work of other authors.

Chapter One of the thesis serves as an introduction to the arguments to follow, using elements of Osborne's biography as a basis. The second chapter examines the contention that the world of the theatre is a major factor in the setting of some of his more important plays. The Entertainer is cited as the most obvious example in this regard, but it is argued that a similar use of the theatre can be identified in Epitaph for George Dillon, Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam, and latterly in You're Not Watching Me, Mummy. In addition, Chapter Two examines the less obvious elements of theatricality which can be identified in The World of Paul Slickey, Luther, Plays for England, Inadmissible Evidence, A Patriot for Me, A Bond Honoured, West of Suez, A Sense of Detachment and the later television plays, the main thrust of the argument being that, although not overtly of the theatre, a great deal of theatrical devices and references lie within the subtext of the plays, deriving from the author's long association with, and his obvious affection for the theatre.

Chapter Three argues that Osborne's close ties with the theatre lead to his populating his plays with theatre people: with actors. This is clearly to be seen in Epitaph for George Dillon, The Entertainer and Time Present where the leading characters are actors by trade. However, the discussion is extended to cover the majority of Osborne's major plays wherein the leading characters can be identified as actor-types, displaying many of the attributes of the professional actor except the job itself. Notable in this regard are Jimmy Porter, Luther, Bill Maitland and Alfred Redl.

The fourth chapter examines Osborne's frequent use of homosexuality, both explicit and implied, as a dominant trait of his major characters. It is argued that as actors or actor-types the characters display an ambivalence which is often realised in sexual terms. The most obvious example is to be found in A Patriot for Me, but a great many of Osborne's major characters, for example Archie Rice, Jimmy Porter and Laurie, display a degree of sexual ambiguity which provides a common theme.

Finally, in an appendix to the thesis, there is a collection of press criticism of the first performances of Osborne's plays together with details (where available) of the first performances.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest that John Osborne's experiences in the theatre, largely but not solely as an actor, are major factors in the the shaping of his plays.

John Osborne (born 12 December 1929) is no longer considered to be a contemporary dramatist; his work cannot be described as 'ultra modern'<sup>1</sup> and he is not in the position of regularly creating new plays which are accorded the respect of a prestigious production. Once considered to be the most influential dramatist at work in Britain, he has not had a new play produced since You're Not Watching Me, Mummy in 1980, and although he admits to having 'a dozen plays in the drawer waiting for a decent production',<sup>2</sup> until a new Osborne play receives critical acclaim, he will continue to be regarded largely as a figure of the 1950s and 1960s.

Osborne's connection with the theatre began, in earnest, in 1948 when he secured a job as Assistant Stage Manager with a touring production of No Room at The Inn by Joan Temple.<sup>3</sup> Prior to this, he had made some brief appearances in sketches and revue whilst at school in Devonshire, and he had dabbled in amateur theatricals at home in North Cheam.<sup>4</sup> He had a rather tenuous link with the music hall via his maternal grandfather:

My grandfather, as young William Crawford Grove, was said to be the smartest publican in London, becoming manager at an early age of a pub in Duncannon Street, alongside St Martin-in-the-Fields. The name of the pub was simply the Duncannon and it is still there, a rather anonymous, fluorescent place clearly quite unlike the fashionable hostelry it had been during my grandparents' tenure. It was frequented by theatrical folk a good deal, including Marie Lloyd.

A central part of the folklore of this period of their life was that my grandmother, pregnant with my mother, came down the stairs of the Duncannon one morning to find Miss Lloyd reeling around the sawdust-covered bar swearing and shouting. My grandmother drew herself up and ordered the barman to escort Miss Lloyd out and hail her a hansom cab. Whereupon, the story continued, Miss Lloyd screamed up the stairs at the young mother-to-be, 'Don't you fucking well talk to me. I've just left your old man after a weekend in Brighton!' I don't know whether this part of the ballad of Grandma is true, but it has an encouraging ring of tinsel fact about it. Anyway, it makes a nice family tableau, and is also the only recorded link I have with the theatrical profession. (5)

From 1948 until 1956, Osborne worked in various repertory theatres in the provinces and in the Home Counties. The standard of theatre in which he was engaged was, by his own account, low; mainly weekly repertory or one-night-stand provincial tours. Of his time at Frinton-on-Sea he writes:

Old ladies arrived in chauffeur-driven cars to performances of more or less chauffeur-driven plays. I lasted about three weeks. (6)

During this period, he began his playwriting career. In collaboration with Stella Lindon he wrote a play called Resting Deep, which was reworked, retitled The Devil Inside, and was produced at Huddersfield in 1950:

On Easter Monday, 1950, I sat in the stalls of the Theatre Royal, Huddersfield, watching the world opening performance of my own play... After less than eighteen months in the theatre, I was watching my own play, or a version of it, being performed in a professional theatre... and there was nine pounds to show for it, a week's salary. (7)

Shortly after his debut as a dramatist, Osborne returned to the stage as an actor with the Saga Repertory Company in Ilfracombe, a company jointly run by Clive St George and Anthony Creighton. Epitaph for George Dillon, Osborne's first really successful piece of writing - although not the first to be successfully staged - was written in collaboration with Creighton and they spent some months sharing flats in and around London until 1955, when they moved on to a houseboat on the Thames at Chiswick. During this period, Osborne worked on Look Back in Anger and, in August of that year, he sent a copy of the play to George Devine, the Artistic Director of the newly formed English Stage Company, a company whose primary objective was to stage new plays by new writers. That George Devine liked the play and that it was staged, with qualified but growing success, is now history - almost folklore.

For an actor to write plays is far from uncommon. In his book, The Modern Actor, Michael Billington writes:

Scratch an actor these days [1973] and you find a dramatist: an exaggeration perhaps but a ponderable one. For even if the acting business is in a terrible muddle, even if the profession is desperately overcrowded, even if there is too much gossip public about private lives, one fact is very much to the industry's credit: that many of the best new dramatists started their careers as actors.

John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Peter Nicholls, Charles Wood, Henry Livings, Alun Owen, Charles Dyer all began as actors and many of them can still be seen performing from time to time. John Osborne, with his cawing voice, high cheekbones and look of sullen fury was very impressive as the doomed aristocrat in David Mercer's television study of post-war Germany, The Parachute. Harold Pinter crops up periodically in his own plays: he played Lenny in The Homecoming at Watford for instance and according to Martin Esslin was even better than Ian Holm in the original production because his particular brand of East End sharpness fitted the role beautifully.(8) And Henry Livings tends to do a good bit of radio, television and theatre work north of the Trent, peddling a nice line in amiable gormlessness.(9)

Indeed, his acting talent was acknowledged by Kenneth Tynan during Osborne's early days with the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. Of Osborne's performance in Nigel Dennis' Cards of Identity, Tynan wrote:

Who should turn up, wearing false sabre teeth and a hairless dome, but John Osborne, ruthlessly funny as the Custodian of Ancient Offices. The Royal Court's captive dramatist stands out from an excellent cast. (10)

and the theatre critic of The Times acknowledged that:

Among good minor performances are those of Mr. John Osborne, Mr. Kenneth Haigh and Mr. George Devine.(11)

Neither is it new for an actor to write plays: Noel Coward provides an excellent example of a man who wrote plays in order to furnish himself with satisfactory roles in which to display his talents. For most of the first half of this century, he dominated the world of light comedy as author, as actor, and often as director. Such plays as Hay Fever, Bitter Sweet, Private Lives and Design for Living were, whatever their shortcomings as drama, splendid vehicles for the exposition of their creator's

own brand of clipped-vowelled, camp humour.

First, and understandably on the basis that writers write from experience, Osborne uses the theatre (and the world of the cinema and television) a great deal as a setting for his plays. Perhaps the most obvious example is The Entertainer, first produced in 1957, which is concerned, on the surface, with the fortunes of a failing music hall artist, Archie Rice. The action of the play takes place in the theatrical lodgings which the Rice family have taken for a short season, and also, most significantly, on the stage of the theatre itself, as the audience witnesses Archie's performance. Epitaph for George Dillon, which was written in 1955, but not staged until 1958, concerns the fortunes of a struggling actor/writer and, although it is not set in the theatre, is most definitely of the theatre. Similarly, Time Present has the world of the theatre as its setting. The leading character is an actress and she is surrounded, predominantly, by theatre people. The companion piece to Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam (both were first staged in 1968), concerns a group of friends from the world of the cinema. One of Osborne's latest plays, You're Not Watching Me, Mummy, a play for television published in 1978, moves directly back the world of the author's own experience, being set backstage in a major West End theatre.

It is inevitable that many of the characters in plays which have a theatrical setting will be actors and actresses, and this



is the second dominant trait in a great deal of Osborne's output. Many of his leading characters, and a significant number of his subsidiary characters, are actors (or actresses). At the beginning of Epitaph, George Dillon is an unsuccessful actor who, during the course of the play, becomes a financially successful dramatist, but he achieves this success at the expense of his artistic principles. Archie Rice is, of course, the archetypal Music Hall artist and both his father, Billy, and his son, Frank, are in the business with him. In this regard The Entertainer is unusual because it is the only play in which the actor is witnessed doing his job on the stage. In addition, there are many instances, and these are discussed later in this thesis, of actors behaving in an actorly fashion offstage, but in The Entertainer, the stage routines of Archie, and to a much lesser degree Frank, are a vital constituent of the action. In Time Present, the central figure is an actress, Pamela. Although she shares an apartment with a woman Member of Parliament, the majority of the play's characters are theatrical: actors, actresses, writers, agents. Similarly, in You're Not Watching Me Mummy, the central character is an actress and she is surrounded by a large group of hangers-on, including actors and actresses.

In addition to using the theatre as a setting, and by implication populating his plays with actors, Osborne, in a large number of cases, creates characters who display many, if not all, of the characteristics of an actor except the title that goes with the job. Jimmy Porter, in Look Back in Anger, performs in

his own private music hall act, and he hides behind the charade of the squirrels and bears routine which he and his wife share. Bill Maitland, the character who dominates Inadmissible Evidence, is a lawyer, and a lawyer is required to perform in front of an audience composed of a judge and jury. Martin Luther, as a clergymen, is required, by nature of his calling, to perform from the pulpit, and in the same play, Luther, Tetzels sells his indulgences with great style and showmanship. In A Patriot for Me, Alfred Redl, the ambitious young army officer, has to act the role of the heterosexual in order to avoid the public recognition of his true sexuality which would blight his promising career. Subsequently, when blackmailed into spying for a hostile power, he has to assume the role of patriot in order to survive.

The actor belongs to a profession which imposes uniquely demanding pressures upon its membership. He is required to assume the characteristics of another person as part of his daily routine, and this is not necessarily a permanent state; these characteristics may have to be changed regularly according to the precise nature of the actor's work.

This puts demands upon the actor which are often manifested in a suggestion of ambiguity reaching back into the character of the actor himself. For example, an off-duty actor will often embellish the telling of an ordinary joke with exaggerated gesture and all the appropriate vocal decorations, turning a run-of-the-mill story into a miniature theatrical masterpiece.



Alan Ayckbourn, an actor before he became a successful dramatist, relates a typical actorly story. Clearly, it loses a little when read rather than heard, but the performance is still discernible:

We were playing in the Lauriston Hall, which is a Jesuit Hall, in Edinburgh. It was one of those exciting plays where you could start with the curtain open: it was an electric curtain. And, as I used to call the Half, Donald [Wolfit] would say: 'You know, there's no harm in a little drink before a show. Can you get me some drinks in here?' And he gave me some money. He said 'I want a bottle of gin and six bottles of Guinness.' So I said 'Yes'. He said 'Don't let them be seen coming in, because you know what I'm dressing in, don't you? You know what this room is?' I said 'No'. He said 'It's the confessional'. I said 'Ah, is it?' And he said 'And the priests are outside, so can you bring them in quietly?' so I whipped out to the off-licence and I smuggled in these bottles, past these long-garbed, eagle-eyed gentlemen who were standing on the front step, smiling at the audience as they came in. And I took them to Donald Wolfit - and this is a true story that no-one ever believes. He poured himself a gin, then he said 'Some water'. There was no water, obviously, in his dressing room. And I said 'Well, the only water is at the other side of the stage, Mr. Wolfit, sir. And the curtain's up, so I can't get across.' He said 'Use your initiative. There must be some water in the building.' And he strode away, with me in tow, crashed down this passage, opened the door and we were in the chapel. And there was this barrel - I swear - that had 'Holy Water' on it. And he topped up his glass with holy water and said 'You see what I mean?' I'd never seen a man drink gin and holy water before. Wonderful. (12)

More seriously, Ayckbourn later describes how actors are tempted to perform even when not in performance. Talking about an occasion when he was directing his own play, Bedroom Farce at the National Theatre, he relates:

They [the understudies] were a lovely bunch, but every time there was anything funny, they laughed. Now that was super.

The actors loved it. But as Michael Kitchen said, the second time he did it, he didn't get such a good laugh, because they'd seen it; and the fifteenth time he did it, he didn't get a laugh at all. What happened then, said Michael, was that he began to push the business up to try to get the laugh back again. And so he was playing artificially because an actor of any sort plays to anything that's there.(13)

Ayckbourn's last sentence is most apposite in the case of Osborne's actors, real and disguised. Archie Rice performs constantly, both on and off the stage, and his real and performed selves slowly merge as the action of the play develops. Jimmy Porter, on the other hand, has a ready-made audience in his own bed-sitting room and his actorly tirades as well as his home-made music hall routines are performed for the benefit of anyone present.

So there is a suggestion of ambiguity inherent in the actor type as he moves from role to role. But Michael Anderson goes a step further:

The actor type often nourishes a strong vein of sexual ambivalence. Psychologists rarely tire of telling us that every human being is a blend of masculine and feminine qualities; but whereas most of us, even in this liberated age, tend to suppress the role for which nature has not physically equipped us, and do our best to carry on as gruff he-men or coy she-women, the actor often spices his or her performance with a dash of bisexuality. 'Thank God I'm normal,' sings Archie Rice in The Entertainer. 'I'm just like the rest of you chaps.' But hardly any of Osborne's protagonists can be said to be normal in the conventional sense of the word. Only A Patriot for Me has homosexuality as its central subject, but one Osborne character after another betrays a fascination with the theme. Here, too, we may see the actor type opening up the secret world of self-indulgence for his audience, touching on forbidden sensibilities with a frankness which the restraints of everyday life forbid. (14)

Anderson's view is neither bizarre nor unique. Perhaps it is simply that the rules of conventional society may be, to an extent, disregarded within the confines of the theatrical profession, thereby allowing predilections and personal traits to be openly expressed which in a different social context, for example in the Armed Forces or in the Civil Service, would be vigorously suppressed. However, it may be true that there are more homosexuals engaged in the theatrical profession than elsewhere. Whichever is the case, there would appear to be a genuine link between homosexuality and the theatre. Donald M. Kaplan claims:

Homosexuality - actually and ideologically - has always hovered about the theatre like a specter, by virtue, notably, though not exclusively, of something essential and unwitting in the actor (15)

He goes on:

Personality correlates with vocational undertakings are virtually non-existent. Something is known about interests and attitudes in connection with certain vocational choices, e.g. the interests and attitudes of forest rangers are statistically different from those of dentists. But personality factors, which are matters of cognitive style, temperament, emotional liability, psychological endurance, vary considerably from individual to individual within a vocational category... Now I have no formal evidence to support this, but I do have a strong clinical impression that performing artists - dancers and actors - constitute an exception; they do share a common personality characteristic with each other and not a trivial one. My impression is that in the actor's personality make-up there is an unstable identificatory experience which the actor exploits as an opportunity rather than complains of as an obstacle; that is, the derivations of a pathogenic experience are perceived by the actor as assets rather than symptoms... The actor is one step behind the homosexual. The actor must just chance and beguile the authority, which he sees embodied in the

theatre audience, as well as the audience created out of the social environment. And having succeeded in this by perpetuating the illusion of a committed identity in the execution of a role, he is then free of guilt - the audience shows approval by applause and the actor is free to return to his private life to indulge the perversity his naturally weak identity has not transformed. Indeed, we fully expect this of the actor. (16)

Kaplan comes dangerously close to overstating his case; 'the actor is one step behind the homosexual' is a view which would be resented by many members of the theatrical profession. Nevertheless, Kaplan's views provide an interesting anticipation of Anderson's previously quoted contention, and even if that too is an oversimplification, their combination clearly reinforces the view that there is, inherent in the actor's character, an ambiguity which may manifest itself in sexual terms.

Evidence in support of this view may be called from within the profession itself. William Hall, in his biography of Michael Caine, Raising Caine, quotes from the actor:

They needed tough-looking guys, and as I'd just come out of the army I was built like a brick wash-house. Most of the other fellows were just a little gay, so when they needed some big rough guy to come in, they had to give me the part. (17)

And Lord Olivier writes, in his Confessions of an Actor, of his early friendship with Noel Coward:

I had got over like a spendthrift sigh my nearly passionate involvement with the one male with whom some sexual dalliance had not been loathsome for me to contemplate. I

had felt it desperately necessary to warn him that, dustily old fashioned as it must seem, I had ideals which must not be trodden underfoot and destroyed, or I would not be able to answer for the consequences and neither would he.

It must be exceedingly difficult to believe that, in spite of my history as a pampered choirboy, and the attentions paid to me at the next school (which, no matter how unwelcome, unfairly labelled me as the school tart), I felt that the homosexual act would be a step darkly destructive to my soul; I was firm in my conviction that heterosexuality was romantically beautiful, immensely pleasurable, and rewarding in the contentment.

It is surprising that this faith should have withstood an onslaught of such passionate interest, and that this, together with the disillusionment that followed the initial experience of my early marriage, did not throw me off course or even make me waiver - well, perhaps I must allow that it did do that.

It would be dreadfully wrong if any of this should be taken to imply that I ever found anything in the remotest way unrespectable about homosexuality; and it is certain that he or she, in pursuit of natural inclinations, should not be pitied for lack of romance in their lives.

I am prepared to believe that the sense of romance in those of our brothers and sisters who incline towards love of their own sex is heightened to a more blazing pitch than in those who think of themselves as 'normal'. Supporting this is my firm conviction that anyone who nurses artistic pretensions must discard any sort of prejudice which might limit the broader understanding of human nature. (18)

The discussion of Osborne's plays which follows will deal in turn with the themes introduced above: the theatrical scene, the use of the actor and the actor type as a character, and the theme of homosexuality. Each theme will be assigned to an individual chapter and at the end of the thesis there is an appendix listing all of Osborne's plays with details of the first production (where applicable) and a selection of journalists' reviews.

NOTES: Chapter One

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1. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (6th Ed.) Oxford, 1976, p.219.
2. Interview with Victor Davies, Daily Express, 8 August 1983.
3. John Osborne, A Better Class of Person, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 173.
4. Op. Cit. p. 171.
5. Op. Cit. p. 21.
6. Op. Cit. p. 250.
7. Op. cit. pp. 220/221
8. I saw both of the productions to which Billington refers and I can vouch for this judgement.
9. Michael Billington, The Modern Actor, London, 1973, p.160.
10. Kenneth Tynan, Tynan on Theatre, London, 1964, p.69.
11. The Times, 27 June 1956.
12. Ian Watson, Conversations with Ayckbourn, London, 1981, pp. 28/29.
13. Op. Cit. p. 157.
14. Michael Anderson, Anger and Detachment: A Study of Arden, Osborne and Pinter, London 1976, pp. 22/23.
15. Donald M. Kaplan, 'Homosexuality and American Theatre', The Tulane Drama Review, Vol.9 No 3, 1968, p. 28.
16. Op. Cit. pp. 48/49.
17. William Hall, Raising Caine, London, 1981, pp. 48/49.
18. Laurence Olivier, Confessions of an Actor, London, 1982, pp. 64/65.



## CHAPTER TWO

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### The Theatre

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#### I

The Entertainer was John Osborne's second play to be successfully staged by the English Stage Company. The impact of Look Back in Anger had been so considerable that Laurence Olivier asked Osborne to write a play for him:

I went round to see John Osborne to congratulate him on his remarkable character performance in Cards of Identity; at the same time I congratulated him on Look Back and boldly asked him if he might ever think of writing a play with me in mind. The humility with which he took this suggestion surprised me; he kept asking me if I really meant it... In an amazingly short time, the first act of The Entertainer arrived; the minute I had read it I phoned George Devine and said I would accept the part on the first act alone.(1)

The entertainer of the title is Archie Rice, a failing music hall comedian whose career is crumbling in line with the fabric of the halls in which he works. In The Entertainer Osborne looks at this crumbling world with an understanding and an affection born of years in the theatre and even longer as a loyal member of the audience. His early life was punctuated by visits to the music hall:

We...went to celebrate with tea at the Regent Palace and on to the first house of a George Black show at the London Hippodrome, and there again were the ranks of huge chorus girls swarming into the auditorium to scoop up male members of the audience and dance with them in the aisles.(2)

In 1956 he wrote of Max Miller, one of his greatest idols:

He was a popular hero more than a comic. He was cheeky because he was a genius. All genius is cheek. You get away with your nodding little vision and the world holds its breath or applauds. Max took your breath away and we applauded. When I was at school, he was popular only with the more sophisticated boys, and girls seemed bored by him altogether although I suspected that the girls I longed to know - big, beautiful WAAFs or landgirls - would adore an evening with him. I loved him as fiercely as I detested the Three Stooges and Abbot and Costello. He was not a great clown like Sid Field nor did he make me laugh so much. The Cheeky Chappie was not theatrically inventive in any profound sense. His fantasy was bone simple, traditional, predictable and parochial...

Some people have suggested that I modelled Archie Rice on Max. This is not so. Archie was a man. Max was a god, a saloon-bar Priapus. Archie never got away with anything properly. Life cost him dearly always. When he came on the audience was immediately suspicious or indifferent. Archie's cheek was less than ordinary. Max didn't have to be like Chaplin or pathetic like a clown. His humanity was in his cheek. Max got fined £5.00 and the rest of the world laughed with him. Archie would have got six months and no option. (3)

Osborne's love of the theatre in general and of music hall in particular is at the core of The Entertainer. He has shaped the play into a series of thirteen short episodes, corresponding to music hall acts, with Archie's front cloth turns interspersed between the domestic scenes of the Rice family at home. This technique earned the play a Brechtian label from a wide cross-section of critics; John Russell Taylor wrote:

It was the first impact of Brecht on his consciousness which made him see the light and begin to find the limitations of realism too impossibly restricting. In The Entertainer, his best play, the influence of Brecht is very marked. (4)

Ronald Hayman more boldly claims, though unfortunately without



revealing his source, that:

According to Osborne himself, it was the influence of Brecht that first made him dissatisfied with the limitations of naturalism. (5)

By contrast, the dramatist himself states:

There were lots of references to Jews. One of my mother's was "Listen to him, John Lawson's son, 'Thank God I'm only a Jew'". This was a reference to a very famous music hall sketch called Humanity performed by John Lawson at a time when, according to serious historians, music hall was well on the way down the pristine path to revue and 'variety'. Twenty years later it was this fragment of theatrical memory that was to nudge me towards The Entertainer, not, as I was told authoritatively by others, the influence of Bertolt Brecht. (6)

The memory of the music hall forms the germ of The Entertainer and in a note to the play text, Osbone states why he uses the music hall format for his play:

The music hall is dying, and, with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone, for this was truly a folk art. In writing this play, I have not used some of the techniques of the music hall in order to exploit an effective trick, but because I believe that these can relieve some of the eternal problems of time and space that face the dramatist, and also, it has been relevant to this story and setting. Not only has this technique its own traditions, its own conventions and symbols, its own mystique, it cuts right across the restrictions of this so called naturalistic stage. Its contact is immediate and direct. (p.7)

This last sentence is the key to Osborne's intention in using a

music hall format. Where Brecht strives for distance by alienating the audience, Osborne seeks contact and he believes that his own love affair with the English music hall can be translated into the serious theatre in order to achieve this.

The play draws extensively upon Osborne's past, not just on his theatrical background, but on his family background also. There is a clear link between Billy Rice, Archie's father - a retired star of the music hall - and the dramatist's own grandfather:

"Billy Rice is a spruce man in his 70's. He has great physical pride, the result of a lifetime of being admired as a 'fine figure of a man'. He is slim, upright, athletic. He glows with scrubbed well-being. His hair is just grey, thick and silky from its vigorous daily brush. His clothes are probably twenty five years old - including his pointed patent-leather shoes - but well-pressed and smart. His watch chain gleams, his collar is fixed with a tie pin beneath the tightly knotted black tie, his brown homburg is worn at a very slight angle.

When he speaks it is with a dignified Edwardian diction - a kind of repudiation of both Oxford and Cockney that still rhymes cross with force, and yet manages to avoid being exactly upper-class or effete. Indeed, it is not an accent of class but of period. One does not hear it often now."

Indeed, one does not. This description is... a part portrait of my grandfather. (7)

and this is confirmed when one compares Osborne's continued description:

Grandpa Grove certainly had his own style, but unlike Billy Rice he could not have been regarded as a star, except in a small way at the height of his career as a publican when there were hansom cabs, cigars and his famous breakfast which was said to have consisted of half a bottle of 3 star

brandy, a pound of porterhouse steak, oysters in season and a couple of chorus girls all year round. (8)

with

"Billy: I used to have half a bottle of 3 star brandy for breakfast -

Archie: And a pound of steak and a couple of chorus girls" (p.37)

It is quite clear that the character of Billy Rice stems directly from Osborne's 'only recorded link with the theatrical profession'.

But there is another family link in The Entertainer. Phoebe, Archie's long-suffering second wife, bears a striking resemblance to the dramatist's description of his mother. They both display similar class characteristics; both are clearly working class and loath to come to terms with the fact. They both display a passion for 'the pictures' and both are dissatisfied with their domestic situations:

Phoebe: I don't want always to have to work. I mean you want a bit of a life before its all over. It takes all the gilt off if you know you've got to go on and on till they carry you out in a box. It's all right for him, he's alright. He's still got his women, while it lasts anyway. But I don't want to end up being laid out by some stranger in some rotten stinking street in Gateshead or West Hartlepool or another of those deal-or-alive holes. (p. 40)

Phoebe's speech invites comparison with the following passage

from Osborne's autobiography:

My mother was insistent that we should not enter into buying because she did not want to be tied down. Thirty or forty times during the first seventeen years of my life we wrapped up dozens of china dogs and pictures, knotted ladies with straining borzois - to move into another house or new digs until her snarling, raw-nailed boredom and dissatisfaction exploded again, driving her to make a dash for another lair. 'I'm fed up with this dead-and-alive hole'. (9)

But the memory of such 'dead-and-alive holes' comes not only from his mother. The round of provincial digs was a major factor in Osborne's life as a young actor and, though these digs have provided him with a wealth of experience upon which to draw, he remembers them without affection. The play text of The Entertainer is dedicated to 'AC' [Anthony Creighton], and the dedication reads:

"To AC, who remembers what it was like, and will not forget it; who, I hope, will never let me forget it - not while there is still a Paradise Street and Claypit Lane to go back to". (p.5)

The seedy ambience of tatty theatrical bedsitting rooms pervades The Entertainer and, although Osborne is to be believed when he claims to love the theatre, it is obvious that his love does not extend to the seedy living which is such an obvious factor in the life of the struggling performer.

The entire play is dominated by Archie Rice, the seedy, failed music hall comedian who hides behind his act in order to

escape from the reality of the world. But Archie's act is not good enough to provide an effective shield: though he 'has a go', his performances are weak and are getting weaker. It is this decline in Archie's professional ability which parallels the decline in the world of the music hall and which acts as an extended metaphor for the decay of England. Part of Archie's act involves an attempt to cash in on the remnants of post war pride which were newly resurrected with the contemporary Suez crisis: it is crude and fifth rate:

Archie:...And now I'm going to sing you a little song, a little song written by the wife's sister, a little song entitled 'The Old Church bell won't ring tonight, as the Verger's dropped a clanger' Thank you Charlie.

'We're all out for good old number one,  
Number one's the only one for me  
Good old England, you're my cup of tea,  
But I don't want no drab equality,  
Don't let your feelings roam,  
But remember that charity begins at home.  
For Britains shall be free  
The National Health won't bring you wealth,  
Those wigs and blooming spectacles are brought  
by you and me.  
The Army, the Navy and the Air Force,  
Are all we need to make the blighters see  
It still belongs to you, the old red, white  
and blue.

(Drop Union Jack from flies)

Those bits of red still on the map  
We won't give up without a scrap  
What we've got left back  
We'll keep - and blow you, Jack  
Oh, number one's the only one for me  
We're all out for good old number one  
Yes number one's the only one for me,  
God Bless you,  
Number one's the only one for me,  
Number one's the only one for me.

(pp 32/33)

This routine, very much in the style of Max Miller, begins with

some slight promise. Peter Davison compares Archie's act with part of Miller's routine:

Max Miller would claim to have written the songs he sang, or that he had had them written by a relative. He would explain, ingenuously, that he was singing them at the request of his recording company, or his mother. He would often announce an outrageous title and then sing something totally different or reverse that procedure. This is from an act recorded at Holborn Empire during the 1939-45 war...

I'll make another change in the programme tonight, ladies an' gentlemen, I'm going to sing another brand new number, a little number entitled, er 'Just because I roll my eyes'. Dedicated to me, lady, because I wrote it myself. An', an' you've been very nice tonight, an' that's why I'm going to sing it for you. After which I shall definitely dance, after this number. You never know when I'm kidding do you.

Now, shall I start it off Sydney? -  
Shall I? An' will you creep in?

Sydney: Certainly

Miller: Will you?

Sydney: Yes

Miller: I'll give you the key, Look I'll tell you what I'll do tonight, Sydney, I'll do two choruses of 'Rambling Rose' with the boys, and then I'll do 'Sally' by meself. Naow, shaddup, whadsamadder with yer? (sings) (10)

Of course, the difference is that Miller was a comic genius and Archie is a failure. The task of representing such theatrical failure presents the actor playing the part with a major hurdle. The above quotations display the similarity in the real life Miller material and the script prepared by Osborne and it would be easy for the part of Archie to be turned into a successful turn, certainly during his earlier appearances. Of Max Wall's performance in a production staged at Greenwich in 1974, directed by the author, Irving Wardle wrote:

The obvious comparison between the original show and the Greenwich revival is that where its stand-up comic protagonist was first played by a great actor, now he is acted by a great clown.

Archie's turn is supposed to be dreadful; and I had fears to begin with that Max Wall would manage to pass it off as brilliant. There are times when he has to stamp on a laugh, when the text specifies hollow silence; but it is clear within minutes that this is going to be a classic reading of the part as well as a classic piece of casting. (11)

The introductory stage directions in the text of The Entertainer display the author's knowledge of the mechanics of the theatrical process:

At the back a gauze. Behind it, a part of the town. In front of it, a high rostrum with steps leading to it. Knee-high flats and a door frame will serve for a wall. The sight lines are preserved by swagging. Different swags can be lowered for various scenes to break up the acting areas. Also, ordinary, tatty backcloth and draw-tabs. There are two doors L. and R. of the apron. The lighting is the kind you expect to see in the local Empire - everything bang-on, bright and hard, or a simple follow-spot. The scenes and interludes must, in fact, be lit as if they were simply turns on the bill. Furniture and props are as basic as they would be for a short sketch. On both sides of the proscenium is a square in which numbers - the turn numbers - appear. The problems involved are basically the same as those that confront any resident stage manager on the twice-nightly circuit every Monday morning of his working life. (pp 11/12)

The use of terms such as 'swagging' and 'sight line' are technical terms which would not be common knowledge to a writer with no theatrical background, and Osborne's seeming familiarity with the stage management routine suggests that he is writing from practical theatrical experience.

The theatrical setting of the plot is quickly revealed in



the text.

Jean: Where's Dad?  
Billy: He's at the theatre. He's playing here - at the Grand this week, you know. (p.17)

This states quite simply that Osborne is dealing with a theatrical theme via the medium of a theatrical family, and a little later, it is revealed that it is a theatrical family in decline:

Jean: What show is it this time?  
Billy: Oh! I don't remember what it's called.  
Jean: Have you seen it?  
Billy: No, I haven't seen it. I wouldn't. Those nudes. They're killing the business. Anyway, I keep telling him - it's dead already. Has been for years. It was all over, finished, dead when I got out of it. I saw it coming. I saw it coming and I got out. They don't want real people any more. (p.17)

Billy, as the old-stager, fills out Osborne's picture of a dying music hall and it is this decline into death that is such a crucial element within the play.

The seedy, declining theatricality pervades the Rice family. Archie's off-stage banter, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, is riddled with theatrical anecdotes ; Billy clings to the memory of his successful years in the halls:

Billy: Me, I was always lucky, always was. Mind you I was good too. That Ambassador, Sir somebody Pearson his name was, charming, absolutely the real best



type, absolutely the best type. He told me I was his favourite artist. Barring George Robey. (p44)

Billy's nostalgic view of the past reflects Osborne's own love of the music hall and his affection for the glories of previous generations: Osborne's love of a bygone age in his sympathetic portrayal of the Colonel in Look Back in Anger and, appropriate to this section of the thesis, the off-stage influence of the dying actor-manager, Gideon Orme, in Time Present.

Frank, Archie's son, is a weak character who is totally overshadowed by his father and grandfather. Billy was a success, Archie is failing, but Frank, despite his pretensions to the theatre, seems destined never to make his mark:

(Frank is a pale, shy boy of about nineteen. He has allowed himself to slip into the role of Archie's 'feed' because this seems to be a warm, reasonable relationship substitute that suits them both... He is young and will probably remain so.) (p.51)

and Phoebe, the archetypal drudge of a housewife, shares a brief moment of domestic limelight as she sings 'The Boy I Love is up in the Gallery' with touching simplicity to an audience composed of her family. (p.66)

However, Archie Rice remains at the centre of the play and it is his decline into insignificance, paralleling the disappearance of an entire art form, which draws the play to its conclusion:

Phoebe appears left holding a raincoat and hat.

Archie: Why should I care

Why should I let it touch me

Why shouldn't I? -

(He stops, the music goes on, as he walks over to Phoebe, who helps him on with his coat, and gives him his hat. He hesitates, comes back down to the floods)

Archie: You've been a good audience.

Very good. A very good audience. Let me know where you're working tomorrow night - and I'll come and see you.

(He walks upstage with Phoebe. The spotlight is hitting the apron, where Archie has been standing. The orchestra goes on playing 'Why should I care'; Suddenly, the little world of light snaps out, the stage is bare and dark. Archie Rice has gone. There is only the music.) (p.28)

Unfortunately for Archie, and for the theatre which Osborne has portrayed in The Entertainer, there is no tomorrow night.

## II

Following Archie Rice, the failed performer, came George Dillon, the actor whose success, by his own standards, is the deepest failure. The play text dates from before Look Back in Anger, but without the success of that play and of The Entertainer it is unlikely that Epitaph for George Dillon would have been staged in London. Simon Trussler writes:

Epitaph for George Dillon was the second play Osborne wrote in collaboration with Anthony Creighton, and it has proved to be a sole survivor among five prentice pieces - the only one that the dramatist has chosen to refurbish for the West End, or to admit into the printed canon of his work. The present text is the end product of at least two stages of revision; and even the play's title was for a time

abbreviated into George Dillon before it reverted to its first and fuller form. (12)

In spite of its joint authorship, Epitaph for George Dillon displays numerous similarities to that work of Osborne which had already been seen on the London stage. In particular, it contains considerable biographical elements and it is a theatrical play with a theatrical basis.

Its broad theme, according to Martin Banham, 'is one typical of Osborne - the destruction of a sensitive and seemingly intelligent man by a decadent and mercenary society'.<sup>13</sup> This sensitive and seemingly intelligent man is George Dillon, an unsuccessful actor and dramatist who is taken under the wing of the matriarchal Elliot family whilst his undistinguished career as an actor further declines into insignificance, and his playwriting skills are debased by financial pressures into commercial success and aesthetic failure.

In this respect, Osborne is able to bring considerable personal experience to bear. His years as a struggling actor - and Anthony Creighton had similar experiences - are clearly to be seen in George's optimistic facade - the promise of work is just around the corner:

George: I saw Ronnie Harris this morning - you know the film man and he said he's got a part for me coming up shortly.  
Norah: What sort of film George?  
George: Don't really know yet - to do with some Army job  
Mrs. E: That'll be nice.

Josie: George! You going to be on the telly.  
George: Well, yes. But its not exactly the lead,  
mind you, but it's something, anyway. (p.41)

The text subsequently reveals that the roles amount to little more than walk-ons, but George, true to the theatrical tradition, cannot be seen to admit to failure. He must maintain as much of a facade of success as he can because without hope and confidence George, like many other actors, would give up or be given up. This theme, of George the actor, is more fully addressed in the next chapter.

The structure of Epitaph for George Dillon owes a great deal to Osborne's experience in the 'chauffeur-driven plays' of the early 1950 s. It is divided into three acts and uses a conventional set. Indeed, true to many domestic dramas of the 1950 s, the author's opening stage directions call for 'French windows which look out on to a small back garden' (p.11). Moreover, each act ends with a well-timed curtain line, completing the immediate impression that this is a conventional play, of the sort which would have occupied Osborne the actor in the early 1950 s.

The central character does not appear for the first eighteen pages of script. However, he is referred to increasingly as the first act develops and this, coupled with the effect of the play's title, gives the role a build-up typical of the highly theatrical, conventional drama with which both Osborne and

Creighton would have been familiar.

The early parts of the play show little more than a completely orthodox dramatic scene; there is some tension, some affection, but there is also a short section of typical Osborne rhetoric as Josie, the Elliot's daughter, illicitly reads a letter which has been received by her aunt. However, amidst all of this convention, Osborne adds a note of incongruity just prior to George's appearance:

Mrs. E: ...I'll have you know this too: George is a fine, clean, upright going man. And he's clever too. He's in the theatrical line, he is, and one day he's going to be as famous as that Laurence Olivier, you see, and then perhaps you'll laugh on the other side of your face.

Percy: Acch! Theatrical line. Don't give me that nonsense. I bet you he hasn't got two ha'pennies for a penny - they never have, these people.  
(p.27)

The conventional stage image of the actor - largely generated by the comedies of the Noel Coward and his contemporaries - of silk dressing gowns and lazy luxury - is here dismissed at a stroke. The rather drab surroundings of the Elliot household are far from those normally haunted by the lay person's idea of the actor, and Percy's wry dismissal of 'these people' and their impecunious state anticipates George's situation in the play, and, ironically, touches upon Osborne's own financial condition at the  
14  
time of the play's conception.

The play, as one would expect in a work concerning an actor,

contains many theatrical references, almost all coming from George. His enforced theatricality pervades the play, manifesting itself in a reliance upon theatrical cliches and stage nuances to create a defensive barrier between himself and the rest of the world. In an exchange with Geoffrey Colwyn-Stuart, a local pastor and mentor of Mrs. Elliot, this is particularly apparent:

George: Frankly, I always touch mine up with a brown liner.  
Geoffrey: What?  
George: The rings under my eyes - helps me when I play clergyman's parts. I'm rather good at them. (pp44/45)

and

Geoffrey: George, you worry too much about whether you're going to rise to the top of your profession. That's not important.  
George: Thank you. We'll let you know (p.46)

George is here dismissing Colwyn-Stuart with the words traditionally used to get rid of an unsuccessful audition candidate.

Epitaph for George Dillon, like The Entertainer, also displays Osborne's affection for the music hall and the provincial picture-house:

George:...(Goes upstage and walks around and is finally

stopped by the sight of the cocktail cabinet). I've sat here for weeks now and looked at that - Oh, I've often marvelled at them from afar in a shop window. But I never thought I'd ever see one in someone's house. I thought they just stood there, in a pool of neon, like some sort of monstrous symbol, surrounded by bilious dining room suites and mattresses and things. It never occurred to me that anyone bought them

Ruth: Norah's cocktail cabinet? Well, she didn't actually buy it, she won it.

George: What was her reaction?

Ruth: I think we were all a little over-awed by it.

George: It looks as though it's come out of a jelly mould like an American car. What do you suppose you do with it. You don't keep drinks in it - that's just a front, concealing its true mystery. What do you keep in it - old razor blades? I know, I've got it! (He sits down and "plays" it vigorously, like a cinema organ, humming a "lullaby - lane" style signature tune. He turns a beaming face to Ruth.) And now I'm going to finish up with a short selection of popular symphonies, entitled 'Evergreen's from the Greats', ending up with Beethoven's Ninth! And don't forget - if you're enjoying yourself, then all join in. If you can't remember the words, let alone understand 'em, well just whistle the tune. Here we go then (Encouraged by Ruth's laughter, he turns back and crashes away on the cocktail cabinet, pulling out the stops and singing:)

"I fell in love with ye-iou  
While we were dancing  
The Beethoven Waltz!..."

(A final flourish on the invisible keyboard: he turns and bows obsequiously...) (pp.54/55)

This short exchange, which is not unlike the make-believe music hall of Look Back in Anger's Jimmy Porter, looks back to the playwright's own youth in which the cinema, with its ubiquitous organist, played such an important part. 'The cinema was my church and my academy. From the age of four I went at least twice a week'.

Like Archie Rice, George Dillon is a failure. But whereas

Archie disappears into insignificance, leaving 'only the music', George is disappearing into a domestic situation which he despises:

Ruth: You've a lot to learn yet, George. If there weren't people like the Elliots, people like you couldn't exist. Don't forget that. Don't think it's the other way around, because it's not. They can do without you, take my word for it. But without them, you're lost - nothing.

George: Don't give me that Ruth. They drive you mad and you know it. It's like living in one of those really bad suitable-for-all-the-family comedies they do all the year round in weekly rep in Wigan. (p.60)

Although the hack reference to Wigan serves to over-cheapen the dialogue, it does add a theatrical gloss to George's bitterness and discontent. However, Osborne ironically makes the point that at least 'weekly rep in Wigan' is a job. George does not even have that.

But George does not fail in the same manner as Archie; he achieves a form of success as a dramatist. At the hands of Barney Evans, a theatrical producer of purely commercial intent, George's play is 'doctored' to conform to the requirements of the mass popular market. Barney Evans is manifestly the theatrical cliché:

(Barney Evans comes in through the front door. He is wearing a rather old Crombie overcoat, an expensive but crumpled suit, thick horn-rimmed glasses, and a rakish brown Homburg hat. He is nearly fifty, and has never had a doubt about anything in all that time.) (p.73)

His advice about dramatic writing leads to George's artistic



failure and commercial success:

Barney: To get back to this play of yours. I think it's got possibilities, but it needs rewriting. Act One and Two won't be so bad, provided you cut out all the high-brow stuff, give it pace - you know; dirty it up a bit, you see... Third Act's construction is weak. I could help you there - and I'd do it for quite a small consideration because I think you've got something. You know, that's a very good idea - getting the girl in the family way... Never fails. Get someone in the family way in the third act - you're halfway there... OK then. You'll be hearing from me. You take my advice - string along with me. I know this business inside out. You forget about starving for Art's sake. That won't keep you alive five minutes. You've got to be ruthless. Yes, there's no other word for it - absolutely ruthless. (pp 76/77)

In Barney Evans, Osborne brings an even sharper taste of cheap but authentic theatricality to the play:

We sent copies to the leading agents, managements and Patrick Desmond... Some-time producer, actor, agent, theatrical entrepreneur and play-doctor... I thought he might have enjoyed Barney Evans as an effective third act scene stealer if not as a simple joke against himself.(16)

Whilst Osborne is not insisting that Desmond was the model for Barney Evans, it is clear that such people as Barney existed and his cheap brand of commercialism provides the final temptation which lures George away from his high aesthetic ideals and brings about his submission to the ignominy of popular taste.

Barney's advice leads to an ironical example of life

imitating art within the play; George does indeed get someone - Josie - in the family way in the third act. But by this time, George's financial embarrassments are over. He is no longer one of 'these people' so despised by Percy Elliot but is becoming a popular and financially rewarded dramatist. He is also, and this further adds to his acceptability in Percy's eyes, married to, although separated from, a famous TV personality. Such a link with popular culture glosses over the seeming misdemeanour of impregnating the Elliot's daughter. Commercial success in the theatre can lend to an acceptance denied to those who can boast of artistic sincerity. This is the play's final irony.

### III

The World of Paul Slickey came in the wake of three successful plays: Look Back in Anger, The Entertainer and Epitaph for George Dillon. In the play, Osborne moves away from the world of the theatre and into the world of the Fleet Street hack. It was also Osborne's first attempt at directing his own work and his first major production away from the confines of the British Stage Company. It was also his first failure:

They say that when The World of Paul Slickey was put on at Bournemouth some people walked out and others slept. Now that it has come to the Palace Theatre, both things are easy to believe.

Its extraordinary dullness may be accounted for by the manifest failure of Mr. John Osborne to make up his mind what he wants to do. He seems in the beginning to have a down against writers of newspaper gossip. This changes into general resentment of popular newspapers, then of popular

taste. Before he has made any notable hits on any of these targets he trains his guns against three pairs of adulterers in one of the stately homes of England.

Here again, he cannot escape dullness. He turns in desperation, as it were, to vulgar mocking of a religious funeral and is heartily booed, some of the booing coming from the stalls. Finally, he falls back on a change of sex as a cure for adultery and the dullness becomes actively boring.(17)

It is ironic that the play is dedicated to those very people who, like the unnamed writer of the above extract from The Times, are the purveyors of candid dramatic criticism:

No one has ever dedicated a string quartet to a donkey although books have been dedicated to critics. I dedicate this play to the liars and the self deceivers: to those who daily deal in treachery; to those who handle their professions as instruments of debasement, to those who, for a salary cheque and less, successfully betray my country, and those who will do it for no inducement at all. In this bleak time when such men have never had it so good, this entertainment is dedicated to their boredom, their incomprehension, their distaste. It would be a sad error to raise a smile from them. A donkey with ears that could listen would no longer be a donkey; but the day may come when he is left behind because the other animals have learned to hear. (p.5)

The dedication did nothing to soften the blows, but it must be said that not all critics disliked the play. George E. Wellwarth writes:

The World of Paul Slickey is pure spit and vomit thrown directly into the teeth of the audience. Commercially it has been Osborne's least successful play; artistically, it is his best. (18)

It is, nevertheless, true to say that the majority of the critics

condemned the play and it stands as the first of a small number of disasters with which Osborne's career as a dramatist is  
19  
"peppered".

Osborne describes the play as a "comedy of manners with music" and as such it represents a departure from the conventionally verbal theatre with which he had hitherto been concerned and in which he had achieved considerable success. However, at the time of the play's first production, Osborne was only twenty nine years old and had been in the theatrical profession for eleven years. Still an angry young man, it is not surprising that he should wish to change the direction of his work, and as he had spent a considerable time in a business where big money and mass appeal were to be found on the musical stage, The World of Paul Slickey might reasonably be regarded as a play  
20  
Osborne had to write.

The first, and most obvious, statement to make about the play is that it satisfies, in a sense, one of the playwright's implied desires: to write a large-scale, set-piece musical.

The World of Paul Slickey has fifteen musical numbers and one can see the germ of these in Jimmy Porter's 'Flanagan and Allen' routine, George Dillon's cinema organist turn and, abundantly, in the song and dance numbers of Archie Rice. However, the significant difference is that in the case of Jimmy and George, the routines are supposed to be pastiches and Archie's performances are supposed to be atrocious. The requirement in

The World of Paul Slickey is for slick, sophisticated, show-stoppers. By all accounts, they almost stopped the show but for the wrong reasons.

The central character, Jack Oakham, does not dominate the action in the manner of George Dillon or Archie Rice. He is, nevertheless, very much an actor-type and this aspect of the play will be covered in the next chapter. However, additional to the presence of an actor type, The World of Paul Slickey has the strands of a theatrical theme running through it. Jack, as the author's mouthpiece, voices, in typical Osborne rhetoric, much of Osborne's vitriol, whilst delivering a passing attack against the Church:

Jack: She [his wife] is still mad about that story I wrote about the Church Commissioners having invested money in her brassiere company.  
Jo: Was it true?  
Jack: What do you mean - true? Once you've said it in print, it's difficult to make it sound like a downright lie. You should know that by this time. It made a nice couple of columns. I simply suggested that the Church's own foundation might yet turn out to be an intimate undergarment in ear-pink and mystery blue. (p.13)

Jack scores a glancing blow against the 'liars and self deceivers'. 'Once you've said it in print, its difficult to make it sound like a downright lie'.

This anti-press theme is developed into an attack against newspaper drama critics a few lines later:

Jo: But, darling, they offered you dramatic criticism on

The Globe. Why didn't you take that?

Jack: I take the theatre too seriously to be a dramatic critic. Another thing - my old man was in the business and I know too much about it. It would show in no time and I'd be out of a job again. Besides, you know I write plays myself.

Jo: Do you know a critic who doesn't?

Jack: That's what I mean. Too much concentrated competition. Someday, people will find out what I'm really worth.  
(p.14)

There is a hint of autobiography in such dialogue, and if these words are suggestive of Osborne's feelings for the critics, by 1966 his views were quite explicit:

My own attitude to most critics is clear and entirely reasonable. It is one of distrust and dislike based on predictability and historical fact. I regard them as something like kinky policemen on the cultural protectionist make, rent collectors, screws, insurance men, customs officers and Fairy Snowmen. One should simply not open one's door to them; the reason for this is fairly simple. They consistently threaten my livelihood and have done so for the past ten years of my working life. Whatever success or reputation I may have earned is due to a few isolated writers on the theatre, the wet noses of news editors, and the blessed alchemy of word of mouth.(21)

Some weeks prior to the publication of this article, Osborne's A Bond Honoured had received a lukewarm reception in the press.

Osborne's view of the theatrical profession in The World of Paul Slickey is somewhat ambiguous. We know from his stated love for the theatre of the regard in which he holds it, and the words of Jack Oakham - 'I take the theatre too seriously to be a dramatic critic' - underline this view. Yet within Paul Slickey there are numerous other lines which begin to add caveats to Osborne's view.

For a start, the jingoistic wartime drama, specifically of the In Which We Serve variety of cinema, is crudely lampooned:

Jack: Remember our brave fighting ships. (Lights dim except for a spot on two men with naval caps and binoculars standing on desks R.)

First Man: 30 seconds to zero.

Second Man: Well, Hawkesworth, this is it (pause)

First Man: Sir, (pause) What are you thinking, sir?

Second Man: Thinking Hawkesworth, thinking. I was just wondering if Celia had remembered to pay the boy's school fees in advance. Had a letter today. He's made the first fifteen.

First Man: Oh, really sir? You must be pretty proud of him.

Second Man: Yes - I suppose I am. Decent kid. Funny the things you think about at a time like this.

First Man: Who do you fancy for the cup final, sir?

Second Man: I've always been a Chelsea supporter myself.

First Man: I'd rather fancied Arsenal.

Second Man: (Thoughtfully) Arsenal. Good old Arsenal. Well, maybe you're right Hawkesworth.

First Man: Five, four, three, two, one, zero.

Second Man: Number One and Two, fire (There is the sound of a terrific explosion)

Common Man: That's what I call entertainment. (pp16/17)

and a little later the 'chauffeur-driven' plays of the author's own past provide a linking pastiche from the end of the first scene into the second:

Common Man (Produces a playbill from his pocket). Where are we? Hallelujah Productions presents in association with Gay Theatre Limited, Dame Penelope Smart and Sir Wilfred Childs in "This is Our World" by Beaumont Ednar. Time: The Present. An early evening in April. Place: A bedroom in Mortlake Hall.

(Blackout)  
(End of Scene One)  
(Music) (p.19)



Writing of this nature bears a striking resemblance to the tired theatre from which George Dillon unsuccessfully attempted to escape.

Osborne continually prods at the heartland of conservative theatre throughout the play. When Lady Mortlake makes her first appearance she is described by the author as 'in the long tradition of magnificently gracious ninnies so familiar to English playgoers' (p.24) and, a little later, this is emphasized:

Dierdre: Mummy, why is it that whenever I see you, you seem to be coming in with an enormous armful of flowers?

Lady M: Do I?

Dierdre: It's just that you look like one of those incomparable actresses who make incomparable entrances from the French windows, bring on half a florist's shop with them and then spend most of the play arranging them and ignoring the play.

Lady M: I wonder if that's where I first got it from. I've never been fond of flowers, as you know. I think one learns so much from the theatre, don't you? One can watch people as they really are and behave. All doing these tiny little things that seem to be so inconsequential at the first glance but which are really quite fundamental and full of significance. (p.24)

The problem is that such dialogue lacks the acerbic bite and the strength to carry Osborne's cynical view fully home.

Perhaps better is the lyric:

A mediocre young actress need not rely on her mattress,/ But if from acting she'll digress, and stick to publicity finesse./ She can be as wet as watercress and still be a success. (p.40)



But even this lacks the directness of a Jimmy Porter or a George Dillon and so the target is missed. However, this is not to say that all of Osborne's anti-theatrical wit is without effect. His pot-shot at the drama school system (p.62) is blunt and direct, and firmly in the tradition of those, like Osborne, who entered the theatrical profession without the benefit of a formal training for the stage.

Nevertheless, it must be said that the manner in which Osborne expresses his dislike of theatrical convention in Paul Slickey is as confused as the play itself. He fails to concentrate his attention on one target for sufficient time to make his point fully, and passing blows at RADA, the Lord Chamberlain and the Grandes Dames of the conservative stage are lost on the bulk of the audience. What he has in effect written is a series of in-jokes to be enjoyed only by those of the profession or at its fringes, and that is largely why it failed.

#### IV

With Luther, the play which restored the author's reputation after Paul Slickey, Osborne left the world of the theatre as a setting for his plays well behind and he was not to return to it, in any serious sense, until 1967 and Time Present. Nevertheless, the plays of the 1960 s contain much which continues the theme of the theatre.

Luther was preceded by a television play, Subject of Scandal

and Concern; Ronald Hayman described it as a 'sketch for Luther' and, insofar as both are episodic in structure and have themes of spiritual choice, this is a reasonable judgement. The central figure of A Subject of Scandal and Concern is George Holyoake, a Socialist peripatetic lecturer who was the last man in Britain to be imprisoned for blasphemy.

The play concerns his trial and imprisonment. As a public speaker, Holyoake possesses the powers of oration which have, by this stage, become such an essential part of the Osborne leading character. He is an actor-type in much the same manner as Jimmy Porter.

For all of the second act of the play, Holyoake's place of performance is the assize court in Gloucester and his audience is composed of the bench and jury. Such a setting has a strong sense of theatricality in its nature. Courts are essentially dramatic places; the words 'courtroom drama' have two distinct spheres of use, one literary, the other legal, and the prosecution of the due processes of the law have often been the subject of popular interest:

Like so many people at that time, he [Osborne's grandfather] took as much interest in law-court proceedings as people do nowadays in football or pop singers and indeed the success charts of lawyers were followed in awe by the British public. It was not a matey familiar business, but a show laid on for the common people by their superiors and masters.(23)

In A Subject of Scandal and Concern, Osborne invests the court-

room with a magic and a mystery which parallels the magic and mystery of the world beyond the pass door. He has not, in fact, strayed too far from his theatrical home territory.

Luther, too, contains a great deal of the theatre. The central character, Martin Luther, is a performer in an ecclesiastical playhouse. Starting from the basis that the theatre originates in religious ritual, Osborne endows the rituals in his play with many theatrical references.

Martin's initiation into the Augustinian Order is watched by his father, Hans, and his companion, Lucas. It is a splendid theatrical set-piece and as the participants leave the stage Hans and Lucas remark upon the impressiveness of the performance:

Hans: You've been sitting in this arse-aching congregation all this time, you've been watching, haven't you? What about it?  
Lucas: Yes, well, I must say it's all very impressive.  
Hans: Oh, yes?  
Lucas: No getting away from it.  
Hans: Impressive?  
Lucas: Deeply. It was moving and oh...  
Hans: What?  
Lucas: You must have felt it, surely. You couldn't fail to.  
Hans: Impressive. I don't know what impresses me any longer.  
Lucas: Oh! Come on .....  
Hans: Impressive.  
Lucas: Of course it is, and you know it. (p.15)

Although this exchange has some validity as a commentary upon a religious ceremony, it is equally valid as a piece of popular dramatic criticism, the repeated use of 'impressive' emphasizing

the visual splendour of the event which seems to override the spiritual significance.

Throughout the play Martin's participation in the religious rituals of his Order is discussed in theatrical terms and the view of Martin as a performer, an actor-type, is discussed in the next chapter.

However, the theatrical aspect of the play is not confined to the formal rituals of the Church. Martin's performances in the Cloister are rivalled by that of John Tetzal, the indulgence vendor. Tetzal stands, as a character in a modern play, in the tradition of the street corner orator, the market-stall pitcher and the itinerant panacea vendor. His business, like that of the stand-up comedian or the actor, is verbal persuasion, achieved via the medium of commercial showmanship of a high order. Osborne describes him thus:

He is splendidly equipped to be an ecclesiastical huckster, with alive silver hair, the powerfully calculating voice, range and technique of a trained orator, the terrible, riveting charm of a dedicated professional able to winkle copper out of the pockets of the poor and desperate. (p.47)

Kenneth Tynan complemented this view in the Observer:

He [Osborne] has raised fairground barking to the level and intensity of art. (24)

Tetzal is remarkably similar to Archie Rice before he and his

world began to decline and, like so many of Osborne's characters, the role of Tetzl is a perfect cameo for the flamboyant actor.

In February 1961, Osborne wrote:

I don't really visualize a picture-frame stage when I'm writing. If I think of anything, I think of a theatre that doesn't exist, one that combines the intimacy of the court with the grandeur of a circus. I'd love to write something for a circus, something enormous and immense, so that you might get a really big enlargement of life and people. (25)

Osborne's vision of a large-scale circus-like theatre is first given some realisation in Luther. The play has a ringmaster:

At the opening of each act, the knight appears. He grasps a banner and briefly barks the time and place of the scene following at the audience and then retires. (p.13)

The Knight/Ringmaster gives the play some of the epic qualities of a Brechtian piece, not, as in the true Brechtian theatre, to alienate the spectators from the action, but simply to enable the author to cover the dramatic canvas which he has set before him.

The play contains a large number of set-piece scenes, staged on a grand scale, such as the ritualistic opening of the play and Tetzl's scene in the Juteborg market place. There are visually stunning costumes which add a pantomimic quality to the play, the entire drama being set on a scale much larger than anything  
26  
previously created by the author.

Following the critical and popular success of Luther, Osborne once more altered the course of his writing and, in July 1962, a double-bill entitled Plays for England was staged at the Royal Court. The first of the two plays making up the bill is entitled The Blood of the Bambergs and, after the upswing in Osborne's career marked by Luther, there followed a decided downward trend. The play was not well reviewed by the press, and, retrospectively, Alan Carter writes:

The Blood of the Bambergs is the feeblest play Osborne has allowed to reach the stage, resting as it does on a pot-pourri of hackneyed ideas about class, royalty and religion. There is not enough humour to sustain the play throughout its two acts. The strong voice of a central character is entirely absent, and the play, by its failure to come alive, reminds us of the importance of Osborne's heroes, and of regarding him as a creator par excellence of dramatic lead parts.

Carter's last sentence points to a major weakness in the play and a significant difference between it and the majority of Osborne's earlier output. Nevertheless, many of the characters within the play display a sense of performance, a theatrical quality which allies them to the, by now, traditional Osbornian leading character. Moreover, the play has a show-business atmosphere which places it firmly in the Osborne style of theatre.

The play's plot is totally improbable. On the eve of a royal wedding, it is disclosed that the groom, Prince Wilhelm, has killed himself in a road accident. Fortunately, an

Australian photographer who happens to be on hand is observed to be an almost exact double of the prince and is therefore substituted for him. It emerges that he is the illegitimate half-brother of the prince and the wedding goes ahead as planned.

The entire piece has a high-society air. Two years previously Princess Margaret had married a photographer: a man who was part of the London scene and who hovered on the fringes of show-business. Bearing this in mind, Osborne has created a play around a state occasion which has all the feel of a theatrical performance, a pantomimic fairy tale in which the beautiful young princess marries her prince after all, and everyone lives happily, we suppose, ever after.

From the outset of the play, the imminent wedding ceremony is discussed in theatrical terms; a great performance:

Looking around me now, into the lofty recesses of this soaring, gaunt and ancient house of worship, it is difficult to believe that this still, silent place will be the very centre of such glorious splendour, such colour and trappings, such grandeur and, yes, I think I must say again, such solemnity. (p.15)

The speaker of these words, who is a thinly disguised caricature of Richard Dimbleby, the most eminent of the BBC's State Occasion presenters, discusses the scene of the next day's ceremony in a manner which could easily be transferred to a description of a theatrical set before the performance. Indeed, a little later 'His Grace, the Archbishop' is referred to as 'what you might

call the leading actor' (p.20) and his function within the proceedings is described as 'his own vital role'. The commentator goes on:

As any actor will tell you, the three hundredth performance of Hamlet may well be the most trying and taxing of all. A familiarity may breed not contempt, but despair. I am sure you will join me in wholeheartedly wishing His Grace good luck for yet another first night. (p.21)

The use of the extended theatrical metaphor not only gives the play the typical Osborne show-business atmosphere, it also pokes mild criticism at the Church establishment.

The real significance of the event is scarcely mentioned but the emphasis is on the pretence; the charade is promoted to the level of paramount importance.

The early stages of the play display some of the conservative elements of Osborne's dramatic style. In a manner reminiscent of his build-up to George Dillon's first entrance, albeit less successfully, he introduces scraps of information which lead, cliché-like, to the news of the Prince's death:

The Prince is at this moment speeding along in his car to be in good time in his appointed place tomorrow. (p.21)

and a few moments later:

The Ministry concerned has cleared the entire length of the



highway for twenty four hours for the exclusive use of the Prince, the Royal Party and, of course, other guests. (p.21)

This seemingly irrelevant information can only point to one event, and when the death of the Prince is finally revealed to the audience, it is obvious that it is part of an Osbornian jibe at the tradition of the 'chauffeur-driven' play.

Once it has been decided that the Australian photographer should substitute for the dead prince, Osborne's theatrical theme shifts away from the ceremony as a performance to concentrate on the performance of the photographer as prince. The theatrical references continue to abound:

Withers: Don't worry, old man. I'll get the Archbishop to cue you in all the way through. He can get him through it (to Taft). I'll say you've got a bad attack of the first night nerves.

Russell: First-night - don't talk to me about that. (p.43)

Osborne also uses the opportunity presented by his employment of the theatrical metaphor to 'have a go' at the old school of the acting fraternity:

Russell: I need time to think about it.

Taft: There isn't any time. And the one thing you mustn't do is think. You must act, and be what you are. (p.44)

simultaneously sharing an in-joke with the theatrical fringe in his audience.

He even manages to squeeze in a touch of vaudevillian humour:

Taft: Good heavens man! What's the matter with you?

Russell: A good question. I can't remember my lines, and I can't stop this bloody sword swinging between my legs.

Taft: Where's your manhood?

Russell: Doing alright till this morning, thank you mate.  
(p.42)

an exchange similar to the Jimmy and Cliff routine in Look Back in Anger bearing some similarity to the risqué patter of the genuine vaudeville double act:

They...told the rest of the 'two old men sitting in deck chairs' gag that had remained unfinished week after week on the BBC...The routine goes: there were two old men sitting in deck chairs and one old man said to the other 'It's nice out', and the other old man said, 'Yes, I think I'll get mine out.' (28)

A little later, the appearance of a devoted fan of the prince, Mrs. Robbins, provides Osborne with an opportunity to include some further comic improbabilities, and her suicide, occasioned by the prince's unwillingness to respond to her sexual advances, in addition to the peremptory execution by Colonel Taft of a reporter, who has been masquerading - acting - as a footman, gives a sprinkling of corpses which adds to the conventional 'chauffeur-driven' appearance of the play. The scene ends in farce, with Russell fumbling a kiss with his princess, then stumbling over his wedding regalia. The princess exits on a line from Russell: 'See you in Church' (p.70), an oft used theatrical euphemism for 'see you on stage'.

The entire second scene of Act 2 is taken up with the wedding ceremony. As such, it provides Osborne with an opportunity to create a dazzling theatrical set-piece owing something to the splendour of Luther's grander scenes and paving the way for the drag ball in A Patriot for Me. However, the driving purpose of the scene is the provision of a *raison d'être* for a series of journalistic commentaries and the grandeur of the occasion is thus subordinated in favour of a series of Osbornian orations deriving from the spectacle. Unfortunately, they lack the originality and sharpness of wit that might have been brought to the event by a Jimmy Porter or a George Dillon. The play ends with the congregation/audience rising to sing the national anthem while the princess smiles and gives a large wink to her prince, reinforcing the fact, at the very moment of the final curtain, that the entire event has been a charade, a piece of large-scale national theatre.

The second half of the Plays for England double bill moves away from the large-scale national theatre of The Blood of the Bambergs and examines a piece of intimate, personal theatre first seen in Jimmy and Alison's squirrels and bears game. In Under Plain Cover Osborne takes the idea of a crucial matrimonial charade and expands it. John Russell Taylor observes:

It is tempting to see it as a sort of fourth act to Look

Back in Anger in which Jimmy and Alison have tired of Bears and Squirrels and gone on to a few more sophisticated party games. The married couple this time, Tim and Jenny, lead perfectly ordinary lives except for their odd hobbies, which consist of acting out a variety of sado-masochistic fantasy situations in clothes which they receive 'under plain cover'.  
(29)

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the games. Tim and Jenny's are designed to add a touch of luxury, a gloss, to their marriage whereas 'squirrels and bears' is the only hope of salvation for Jimmy and Alison. Consequently, Under Plain Cover is a rather more lightweight piece of theatre.

Tim and Jenny are actor-types: they spend most of the play's first half performing in their fantasy games. But the theme of the theatre itself, while considerably subordinated in Under Plain Cover, is not totally ignored. Osborne uses the opportunity, during one of the fantasies, to deliver an attack upon his hated 'liars and self deceivers', the critics. Tim and Jenny, in the course of darting from role to role, elaborate a protracted conversation about underwear, until they finally assume the characters of a pair of Third Programme drama pundits, discussing a pair of knickers in theatrical terms:

Tim: This week, we have been to see 'knickers'. What did we feel about this? Soaptender: Well, in the first place, there seemed to me to be far too much production. And production of a kind I find particularly irksome. After all, we saw all this in the twenties surely. Expressionism and everything.

Jenny: If only the verse could be allowed to speak for itself.

Tim: Exactly.  
As for the garment itself. Well, construction is

weak of course. So is the plot. But we have learned in recent years to bear with that somewhat in exchange for a little vitality. But somehow this elastic doesn't seem to know exactly what it's aimed at and the final gesture is totally inadequate, irrelevant and with a basic failure to be coherent. We are left to work out our own causes. Futility is our only clue. It seems to me that these knickers are speaking out of a private, obsessional world - full of meaning for them. But has it any significance for us? I think not. On the whole, a dull, rather distasteful evening.

Jenny: Not without quality. On the other hand, I would not say straight out it had no quality at all. What do others think?

Tim: Doesn't seem to have found an entirely satisfactory form for what they are trying to say. The reason for the elastic is never clearly or adequately explained.

Jenny: By no means a total artistic success.

Tim: I thought them schoolgirlish and sniggering. Very tiresome indeed. At least bikinis are brief! It's all very vigorous in an undisciplined way. One does get so tired of these chips on the gusset. Very self indulgent and over-strident, especially in the length of the leg, I thought. Colour was reasonable, but surely Herbert Farjeon did these with much more taste and economy?

And after all, this frenetic destructiveness is hardly helpful. What do they really offer to put up as an alternative? We are left unsatisfied with questions posed and nothing answered.

Hear, hear! This sour souffle certainly failed to rise for me. Although everyone tried hard enough. I suppose what they were aiming at was pure lingerie. Ah - you mean like pure cinema. Exactly, and then, of course, there's the obvious influence of Genet.

Indeed. To say nothing of

James

Ionesco

Fanny Burney

Troise

- and his mandoliers too. Let's not forget them. That influence is quite clear. (pp 117/118)

This parody, which, according to Hayman, derives from press comment on Osborne's own work, has two purposes. It is an obvious broadside against his despised critics, but it also adds

further to the theatricality of Tim and Jenny. Part of their own private theatre involves acting out a theatrical piece, creating a double-helix of role-playing which compounds the ambiguity of their characters.

The Plays for England were neither an artistic nor a commercial success, and, following the acclaim surrounding Luther, it was clear that Osborne needed to revise his tactics if his early reputation was to be restored. His next play, Inadmissible Evidence, which appeared some two years after Plays for England, provided this restoration.

## VI

Osborne's new play opened at the Royal Court on 9 September 1964 to considerable acclaim. In The Sunday Times, Harold Hobson wrote:

Naturally, you want to know which is Mr. Osborne's best play. Go to the Royal Court and you will see it. (31)

and in his book on Osborne, Simon Trussler claims:

Of all Osborne's lessons in feeling, Inadmissible Evidence has so far been the most impressive. I think it is also the likeliest of his plays to retain an audience in the living theatre. (32)

This view is, in part, confirmed by Bernard Levin's comments upon

a revival of the play, staged at the Royal Court in 1978, directed by Osborne and with the original leading performer, Nicol Williamson, in the role of Bill Maitland:

John Osborne has never written anything else so good; it is a final measure of the play's success that it leaves us convinced that he will, one day, when he finds what he is searching for, write something better. (33)

Inadmissible Evidence is in the tradition of Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer. John Russell Brown writes:

Inadmissible Evidence is the only play to develop in a straight line from Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer. It centres upon a dominant performer-character to such an extent that he is on stage for the whole play. (34)

The dominant performer-character is a solicitor, Bill Maitland, and the play is concerned solely with an exposition of his emotional collapse. This dominant theme subordinates the theme of theatricality throughout the play.

However, there are obvious factors within the piece which remind the audience that the play is the work of an actor. It has already been observed, in the passage dealing with A Subject of Scandal and Concern, that the lawyer, like the actor, serves as a communicator and that the proceedings within the courts were, to the young Osborne, a variety of popular theatre. Inadmissible Evidence opens with just such a piece of popular theatre:

The location where a dream takes place. A site of helpless-

ness, of oppression and polemic. The structure of this particular dream is in the bones and dead objects of a solicitor's office. It has a desk, files, papers, dust, books, leather armchairs and sofa, a large Victorian coatstand and the skeleton of an outer office with clerks, girls and a telephonist. Downstage is a dock in which stands the prisoner of this dream, Bill Maitland. At back, high above the outer office, hangs the Royal Coat of Arms. In front of this are the green benches of one of the High Courts of Justice, in which sits one of Her Majesty's judges. From centre, a Clerk of the Court reads the indictment. Before this there has been an air of floating inertia before the three actors come to some sort of life out of the blur of the dream. (p.7)

With this setting as his introduction to the play, Osborne combines two theatrical images: that of the dream, the living  
35  
theatre of the mind, and that of the courtroom.

Moreover, the use of a dream sequence is a relatively conventional method of increasing the spread of a dramatist's canvas. Nevertheless, the courtroom drama which unfolds to become the prologue to the play proper rapidly ceases to display the qualities of conventional drama.

It is clear that the dramatist is sharpening the focus of his attention on to one man, Bill Maitland; it is, from the outset, apparent that this is another Osbornian one-man show.

The text has a sprinkling of directly theatrical references. Bill speaks of learned counsel's 'effortless voice production' (p.15) and, a little later, there is the, by now, anticipated Osborne jibe at the 'chauffeur-driven' theatre of his earlier days:



Bill: She married some corpulent financier.  
Hudson: Who?  
Bill: Betty. I'm always seeing his name on building sites...She's a nice kid. Don't see much of her now. Seen her at some of those theatre first nights he's so fond of. Hemmed in by all his thrusting sycophants - I should think she can hardly see him through her mink. (p.24)

Bill's daughter, Jane, who appears in the play but does not speak, is a child of the Swinging Sixties. Osborne does not specify her occupation, but by implication she is in the theatre - a drama student:

Bill: (on telephone) Jane? Hello, Darling. How are you?...How's the drama then? I don't mean your personal drama if you have one, I mean speech training and improvisation or whatever it is? Good, well I'm glad. You deserve it. You see, you'll be a dame before I die. (p.52)

Osborne, an actor who learned his trade in the repertory system is here 'having a go', albeit in a somewhat benign manner at the drama schools. He does not hold the drama school-trained actor in high regard and, just as he, later in the play, dismisses his daughter for her featherweight approach to life, here he quietly sends up her approach to her career. This view is stated more explicitly in his autobiography:

The average age of the Saga Repertory Company turned out to be about twenty-one, all of them almost immediately out of RADA or the Young Vic. Stella Linden would have dismissed them all as amateurs. (36)

However, in Inadmissible Evidence, Osborne's attention is

predominantly devoted to creating a major dramatic role. In Bill Maitland, he has written a mammoth virtuoso opportunity for the actor: the character is very much in the mould of the actor type and as such he will be examined in the following chapter.

## VII

A Patriot for Me opened at the Royal Court only nine months after Inadmissible Evidence. It marked yet another change of direction and its production was surrounded in controversy. The major theme of the play, isolation from society, is not an uncommon Osborne theme.

Archie Rice, Luther and Bill Maitland are all men apart in one sense or another, but the reason for the isolation of Alfred Redl, the leading character, follows on from the short but crucial scene between Bill and Maples in Inadmissible Evidence; Redl is a homosexual. With homosexuality at the core of the play, it is not surprising that the Lord Chamberlain, in 1965, refused to license the play without substantial deletions. Osborne refused to submit to this ruling and the play was thus restricted to performance in a private theatre, the Royal Court being turned into a club for the purpose. The Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship were revoked in 1968 and A Patriot for Me was revived at Chichester in 1983. It subsequently transferred to the West End and the revival was notable for the warmth of its reception.

Like Luther, A Patriot for Me is based upon historical fact and Osborne uses an epic format to fit the wide ranging story on to his stage. In a transcript of a conversation with the author published on the day upon which the revival opened at Chichester, Brian Appleyard describes the play's style as 'highly coloured' and 'theatrical'<sup>37</sup>. This is one of the play's hallmarks. Whereas its predecessor was dully claustrophobic, A Patriot for Me is almost pantomimic - the splendour of the Fin de Siecle settings and costumes are evidence of the author's love of spectacle which is so apparent in the grandeur of Luther.

This love of the theatrical set-piece is seen at its best in the opening scene of Act 2. This scene, a scene which the Lord Chamberlain wanted to be removed in its entirety, depicts a drag ball and Osborne writes at some length to ensure that it is staged in the correct fashion:

A Ballroom, Vienna. A winter evening in 1902. In the background, a small eccentrically dressed orchestra plays. The light is not bright when the curtain goes up, except on the singers. Concentrated silently, at first, anyway, are the Guests, among whom is Redl, one of the few not in fancy dress of some kind. However, he looks magnificent in his uniform and has put on a few decorations. He sprawls, listening thoughtfully to the SINGER, smoking one of his long black cigars. The SINGER is dressed in an eighteenth century dress which might allow the wearer to play Susanna in 'Figaro' or one of Mozart's ladies like Zerlina. The ORCHESTRA plays very softly, the SINGER is restrained at this time, which is as well because the voice is not adequate. However, it has sweetness in feeling to immediately invoke the pang of Mozart. Perhaps 'Vedrai Carino' or 'Batti, Batti' from 'Don Giovanni'. It ends quickly. Applause. Then a MAN dressed to play 'Figaro' appears, the lights become brighter, and the two go into the duet in the first scene of 'Figaro'. This should take no more than three minutes. It should be accepted at the beginning as the indifferent effort of a court opera house cast with amateurs, but not without charm and aplomb.

The 'Figaro' in this case is a straight man. Presently the 'Susanna' begins straight, then gradually cavorting, camping and sending up the character, the audience, AND Mozart as only someone in drag has the licence. The ballroom audience has been waiting for this, and is in ecstasy by the time it is over. Some call out 'do the Mad Scene', or 'Come Scoglio'. The 'Susanna', egged on, does a short parody of something like 'Come Scoglio', or 'Lucia' done in the headlong, take-it-on-the-chin manner.

This only takes a couple of minutes and should be quite funny. Anyway, the ballroom audience apparently thinks so. Obviously, most of them have seen the performance before. There is a lot of giggling and even one scream during the ARIA, which 'Susanna-Lucia' freezes with mock fury, and ends to great applause. 'Susanna' curtsies graciously. The lights in the room come up, the ORCHESTRA strikes up and most of the guests dance. It is essential that it should only gradually be revealed to the audience that all the dancers and guests are men. The costumes, from all periods, should be in exquisite taste, both men's and women's, and those wearing them should look exotic and reasonably attractive, apart from an occasional grotesque. The music is gay, everyone chatters happily like a lot of birds and the atmosphere is generally relaxed and informal. (pp 71/72)

This lengthy stage direction continues with a detailed description of the various guests' costumes and the whole is then supplemented by a page and a half of notes describing the various categories of participants at such a high society drag ball.

Such ultra-specific authorial notes are typical of Osborne's work; his opening stage directions to The Entertainer and George Dillon have already been noted and this adds to the argument that Osborne is, in addition to being a writer, also exercising skill as director and designer via his written instructions. Such is the legacy of his early experiences in the provincial theatre.

There is, in the opening of the drag ball scene, further

evidence of Osborne's already noted passion for the music hall.

The 'Figaro' character is described as a 'straight man' and 'Susanna', in performing 'in the headlong, take-it-on-the-chin manner', is creating a piece of classic vaudeville. The entire scene has something of pantomimé: grand spectacle, radical changes of role across the sexual divides and comic musical turns. It is, in essence, a piece of large-scale popular theatre.

A Patriot, like Inadmissible Evidence, has a number of references to the theatrical coterie of the day. The cafe society depicted in the third scene of Act 1 is an historical version of the theatrical 'scene' of the 1960's, populated in Inadmissible Evidence by Bill's daughter and her friends, and yet to be seen in Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam and in the majority of Osborne's later works. In addition, the world of society theatre impinges upon Redl's life in Viennese society. There are references to chorus girls (p.65) and to the opera (p.118) and the drag ball concludes with a short, vicious confrontation between Redl and a young transvestite, Ferdy, which is dismissed as 'melodrama' (p.91). But Osborne's prime concern in A Patriot is to depict the dilemma of a man who is forced to play the part of something he is not. Redl has to act to save his career and is thus in the classic tradition of the Osborne actor type. It is a demanding role, providing a fine showcase for the actor and of Alan Bates' performance in 1984, James Fenton wrote:

Alan Bates...is obliged throughout the play to take his shoes off and act his socks off...(38)

This aspect of the play, and the dominant theme of homosexuality, will be fully discussed in the subsequent chapters.

### VIII

'Act his socks off' is very much what Robert Stephens had to do in Osborne's next work, A Bond Honoured. The play opened at the National Theatre (The Old Vic) on 6th June 1966 and it was received with a mixed response from the critics. W.A. Darlington<sup>39</sup> conceded that 'the piece has its attractions', whereas the critic of The Times conjectured that:

Perhaps the original is a masterpiece but Mr. Osborne seems to have gone to work more in a spirit of self indulgence than of reinterpretation. (40)

A less immediate discussion of the play, that of John Russell Taylor in Anger and After, begins:

41

Osborne's next work...need not detain us long

and similarly, it is not the intention, in this thesis, to dwell too long on A Bond Honoured.

In an introductory note to the published text, Osborne

wrote:

In 1963, Kenneth Tynan, Literary Manager of the National Theatre, asked me if I would adapt La Fianza Satisfecha by Lope da Vega. It was in three acts, had an absurd plot, some ridiculous characters and some very heavy humour. What did interest me was the Christian framework of the play and the potentially fascinating dialectic with the principal character. So I concentrated on his development (in the original he rapes his sister in the opening moments of the play without any preparatory explanation of his character or circumstances) and discarded most of the rest, reducing the play to one long act. A Bond Honoured is the result. (p.9)

The play was something of an experiment for Osborne. He had previously utilized extant sources for his work, notably in the case of Luther, Erikson's Young Man Luther, and Fielding's novel formed the basis for his screenplay Tom Jones. However, A Bond Honoured is his first attempt at an adaptation from an existing play. His specified staging is also experimental. He had resorted to epic theatre with Luther and A Patriot for Me, but in A Bond Honoured he extends this method:

All the actors in the play sit immobile in a circle throughout most of the action. When those who are all in the same scene rise to take part in it, they all do so together...(p.15)

This manner of staging the play, described by Trussler as 'self  
conscious',<sup>42</sup> is not original; indeed it was utilized by John Harrison in his 1965 production of Marlowe's Edward II at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. It is, however, effective in that it creates an element of alienation and a sense of duality in the performance, because the action is observed not only by the



audience but also by the other actors. Thus, the focus of attention upon the performers is sharpened, especially upon the central character, Leonido, giving the action a ritualistic quality which falls in with Osborne's previously noted love of the ritualistic, circus-like theatre. Martin Banham reinforces this view:

It is...ritual drama of a kind more familiar in the religious and myth dramas of parts of Africa and Medieval Europe.(43)

The sharpening of the focus of the play on to a dominant central character is not a change of direction for Osborne, but his method of staging A Bond Honoured is a radical shift away from his typically conventional format. His adaptation of Lope de Vega's work took on the air of a theatrical experiment, owing much, according to Michael Anderson<sup>44</sup>, to Artaud, whose Theatre of Cruelty was enjoying considerable contemporary interest.

The end result is that the leading actor 'seemed to be moving too much, working up an energy which he was having to compose from outside of the situation'.<sup>45</sup> This gave the play an imbalance which was the prime reason for Osborne's experiment resulting in failure.

## IX

Following the disappointment of A Bond Honoured, it was



almost two years before Osborne's next play opened and it marked a return to territory of a safer nature. On 23 May 1968, Time Present opened at the Royal Court to a favourable reception, subsequently transferring to the West End. For her performance as Pamela, Jill Bennett, Osborne's wife, was awarded the Evening Standard Actress of the Year Award and Milton Shulman claimed:

Undoubtedly, 1968 was dominated by the work of John Osborne. Two new plays - Time Present and The Hotel in Amsterdam - firmly established his claim to be among the greatest, if not the greatest, of living English playwrights. (46)

Osborne's reputation was restored.

The safer territory to which he returned was the theatre. Time Present, in the tradition of Look Back in Anger, Luther and Inadmissible Evidence, is a one-man play, albeit in this instance the one-man is a woman. Significant to this discussion, she is an actress, she is of a theatrical family and the play is set in the world of the theatre.

As an actress of limited success, Pamela shows some similarity with Archie Rice and George Dillon. Unlike George Dillon, she seems not to display any high ideals about her profession; she is not trapped by her own aesthetic parameters. But, as with Archie, she is a creature from another age. The music hall of Archie Rice is dying, indeed Osborne metaphorically kills it off with the death of Billy Rice. Pamela's theatre is dying too. The offstage figure of her father, Sir Gideon Orme, an actor-manager in the Wolfitt tradition, personifies, in his

decline and death, the end of a theatrical era. It is this era for which Pamela mourns. She longs for the triumph of a conventional theatre and voices her dislike of the unconventional in true Osbornian rhetoric:

He's a poet. I think he cuts out bits of old copies of the Illustrated London News and American comics and pastes them together. Yes, they get published. He used to paint a little in the same fashion. He'd glue bits of his Levis on to strips of glass and top them with different coloured paints and plaster. He told me this evening he wants his dad to put him into publishing. Perhaps that's why he went to Murray's party. He's very keen on a lot of American plays, sort of leaving nude girls in plastic bags at railway stations.

Non-verbal, you understand, no old words, just the maximum in participation. (pp 46/47)

Here, Pamela fires an Osborne broadside at the 'happening'. What is interesting to note is that his earlier work, notably George Dillon, criticized the 'chauffeur-driven' plays which had formed such a significant element of his own acting career. In Time Present, he criticizes the opposite extreme, effectively pleading a case for the middle ground.

Osborne's love for the passing theatrical generation is epitomized in Pamela's love for Orme:

Edward: I never saw Orme in Macbeth. What was he like?  
Pamela: The best.  
Edward: So they tell me. Bit before my time.  
Pamela: Too bored to bother, you mean.  
Edward: (picks up cutting book) Here he is. Playing Arthur Bellenden. Of the 21st London Regiment. Act One. Nutley Towers. A Friday Evening. He looks quite something.

Pamela: He was - he was ravishing. (p.52)

Pamela idolizes Orme; she seems fascinated by the idea of his theatricality and the fact that he is dying in the 'time present' of the play's title signifies a regret that his like will not be seen again.

The whole play, as a necessary result of its theatrical setting, abounds with theatrical references and cliches. At the opening of the play, Osoborne's traditional lengthy and detailed stage directions contain the following:

On the wall...is an old poster. It says simply "New Theatre, Hull. Gideon Orme - Macbeth - with full London cast, etc' On the table is a rather faded production photograph of an ageing but powerful-looking actor in Shakespearian costume. (p.13)

Thus, the theatrical ambience is established even before any dialogue is spoken, and immediately it begins, it is clear that the setting is as theatrical, in its own way, as in The Entertainer. Within a page of the play's opening, there is a reference to 'The Shaftesbury' (p.14) and over the next five pages the world of the theatre is a constant feature of the dialogue, building up to the entrance of his leading character:

Pauline: Well, I mean, Pamela's an actress.

Edith: She's not exactly unintelligent, darling. (p.15)

Dialogue of this, and similar, nature reinforces the existence of

the world in which the play is set, at the same time - 'she's not exactly unintelligent' - striking a small blow on behalf of the acting profession. When Pamela does appear, her entrance takes the form of a conventional cliché:

Constance: She probably walked.  
(Enter Pamela. She is in her early thirties, too)  
Pamela: Hello. Hello, Edith. I walked. (p.20)

Such lines could be labelled cheap, and indeed they do belong to a type of play which could well deserve the label 'chauffeur-driven'. But the purpose of introducing Pamela, the actress in love with a dying theatre, with such drawing-room-comedy dialogue underlines her connection with, and affection for, such plays. Pamela-the-actress belongs to a theatrical world which is not of the present.

Once Pamela, the actress, is on-stage, the remaining characters fall in around her and simply focus the audience's attention upon what she has to say. Most of the conversation is theatrical or is peppered with theatrical references, and it floats across the footlights on a tidal wave of champagne. Many of the supporting characters are from the world of the theatre or are on the fringe of it. Murray is a playwright who, in George Dillon fashion,<sup>48</sup> impregnates Pamela. Bernard, who procures her abortion, is her agent; Abigail is a young, attractive and successful actress who is the butt of much of Pamela's Osbornian invective:

Pamela: My opinion about you or anything isn't worth - what, any more than that great booby of a tinkerbelle, Abigail. Abigail: just because she's made a movie and someone's talked about the mystery behind her eyes. She's got no mystery behind her eyes, she's just myopic which enables her to be more self-absorbed than ever and look as if she's acting when she's just staring at wrinkles on your forehead.

Constance: Thank heavens! Oh-come, there's more to her than that.

Pamela: I'll tell you just what there is. And this I do know about. She moons about on street corners in a French movie, looks listless and beautiful in her own big, beady way while you hear a Mozart Requiem in the background. She plays with herself, gets the giggles while she's doing it and then they say she's a cross between Garbo and Buster Keaton. (pp37/38)

Typical Osborne oratory, and it also contains a statement which uncovers some of Osborne's sentiments for the theatrical coterie of the day. His own love of the passing, epitomized in The Entertainer, gives rise to a dislike of the trendy, and on such a premise, it is possible to see much of Osborne in Pamela.

X

The show-business coterie also populates Osborne's next play, The Hotel in Amsterdam, a companion piece to Time Present. It is a play which attempts to move away from the by now familiar Osborne technique of the one-man play by grouping three couples in a luxurious Amsterdam hotel suite. However, Laurie, one of the six, soon emerges as the star figure - he was originally played by Paul Schofield - and the play develops into yet another quasi-one-man show.

The characters within the play are, Laurie - a successful

screen-play writer - and his wife Margaret, Gus - a film-editor, and his wife Annie, and Dan - a painter - who is married to Amy, secretary to K.L. a movie mogul who dominates their lives and from whom they have escaped to Amsterdam for the weekend. So the territory is fairly familiar to the author. Osborne had, by this stage in his career, won an Academy Award for Tom Jones and Look Back in Anger, The Entertainer, Luther and Inadmissible Evidence had all been made into relatively successful films. Moreover, in 1958, Osborne, along with Tony Richardson, founded his own film company, Woodfall Films. Nevertheless, the show-business setting of the play is purely incidental.

The Hotel in Amsterdam is not a play about show-business or even show-business people, although it does give us some telling insight into the fears and anxieties of creative people. (50)

What is important about the characters in The Hotel in Amsterdam is that they should be affluent, vital and open with each other to an extent which comes only from extended friendship. Successful media-folk meet such a requirement but they could just as easily have been antique dealers or travel agents; it is simply a convenience to use the cinema.

In order to maintain the authenticity of his chosen setting, Osborne sprinkles the dialogue with a dusting of show-business references. Laurie compares the attentions of the American cinema enthusiasts with the attentions heaped upon Oscar Wilde (p.97) and he invents a running joke - The Golden Sanitary Towel

Award - which is an obvious jibe at the show-business award-giving system.

In addition, Osborne crafts the play in a conventionally theatrical manner. The text begins with the expected lengthy stage direction, owing something to Coward and introducing the six major figures:

They are all fairly attractively dressed and near or around forty but none middle-aged. In fact, they are pretty flash and vigorous-looking. (p.87)

Osborne is at pains to ensure that they are not mistaken for ordinary folk, emphasising this point when, in response to a comment about their rooms, Annie replies 'We're paying enough for them'. (p.87)

Throughout the play, the off-stage figure of K.L. is never far from the action. Like Archie Rice's Tax Man and Bill Maitland's man from the Law Society, he is a constant threat. From page 93 onwards, he is never far from the group and Osborne, in a somewhat 'chauffeur-driven' manner, builds up the shadow of this unseen figure until the news of his suicide completely deflates the bonhomie of the group and ends the play.

Like theatre folk, Laurie and his friends try to remain behind closed doors; their lives are as much a secret to be kept to themselves as is the whole world behind the pass door. Thus, the unexpected arrival on the scene of Gillian, Laurie's sister-

in-law, is an intrusion which is resented insofar as she represents the public, those outside the coterie who have no place within it. Her arrival is the weakest point in a largely successful play. However, its success is largely due to the strength of the central character, and his strength will be examined in the next chapter.

## XI

Having moved away from the familiar territory of the theatre, although not too far, in The Hotel in Amsterdam, Osborne's move into the 1970s continued the same trend. His next three plays, The Right Prospectus, West of Suez and an adaptation of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, rely for their settings upon non-theatrical society, so the reduction in the number of theatrical references and in-jokes, highly noticeable in the comparison between The Hotel and its companion piece, Time Present, becomes even more marked.

The Right Prospectus, Osborne's first play for television since A Subject of Scandal and Concern, is a fantasia in which a successful couple in early middle age enlist as pupils at a boys public school in order to enjoy the kind of education which they feel has been denied them. They slip into the roles of school-boys without notice by the school staff or their fellow pupils, the overall incongruity of the situation passing totally without comment; their performances in their chosen roles reach the standard of perfection.



James Newbold, the husband, is by suggestion, a writer:

To be honest, I can't say I know your work well at first hand...but I know many of the boys certainly do...I'm sure they would have been most intrigued to meet you. (p.10)

So the move away from Laurie is perhaps not too great; Osborne has stayed on territory with some familiarity. Indeed, the play does contain the odd reference to the commercial media:

Mrs. Newbold: Darling, you do live in the past - there aren't any spivs any longer.

Newbold: Oh yes there are! They make telly commercials, run men's boutiques and write scripts and things like that. (p.15)

That view looks back to the 1950s and George Dillon's scheming mentor, Barney Evans. The play also contains a minor jibe at the modern trendies, attacked so openly in Time Present, especially in the form of the successful young actress, Abigail. In The Right Prospectus, Abigail's disguise is removed:

Not that it's of any interest as the building is as undistinguished as its scholars...Goody-goody, dull and naive but brutal, competitive like only the most inspired mediocrities, they'd all like Vanessa Redgrave to be their mother and visit them on Speech Day. (p.29)

and Osborne also includes a tongue-in-cheek blast against his own profession:

No one talked about work. Not like here. Oh - politics,

sociology. Things like that. Well: we did things - like that. And then there were less intellectual things. Films, Plays, Dancing...(p.34)

However, the major point about The Right Prospectus is that, like so much of Osborne's work, the play is structured in such a way that it focuses upon the sections in which the author's views on life, politics, the church, society can be aired. In this case, the views come from the mouth of the Head Boy, Heffer; hardly a virtuoso piece of acting, but an opportunity nonetheless and one which elevates the role into the actor-type category to be discussed subsequently.

## XII

West of Suez shows some similarity with The Hotel in Amsterdam, indeed Arnold Hinchcliffe suggests some continuity:

They will not come to this hotel or even Amsterdam again, but, as Laurie says at the end of the play, '...I expect we might go somewhere else...' (51)

Osborne, in fact, sends them West of Suez.

But the society to which Laurie and his group belong is that of successful show-business; Wyatt Gillman, his family and his acquaintances are more distant, literally and metaphorically from the theatricality of K.L.'s movie empire. Like Laurie, Gillman is a writer, and the play contains a number of other characters who are in the communication business. Owen Lamb is

also a writer and Robert, one of Gillman's sons-in-law, is a teacher. In addition, there is a journalist who provides Gillman, via the device of an extended tape-interview, with the opportunity to voice a collection of Osbornian views on religion, women's rights and, in true Osborne fashion, the 'liars and self deceivers'.

Critics are sacrosanct. You must make it clear to your readers that they are simply and obviously more important than poets or writers. That's why you should always get in with them. You see, what we chaps do may be all right in its little way, but what really counts is the fact that if it weren't for the existence of critics, we shouldn't be around at all or would just be on the dole or running chicken farms. Never make cheap jokes about critics. You've got to remember this: the critic is above criticism because he's got the good sense never to do anything. He's up there helping us poor little guys to understand what the hell we're doing, which is a jolly helpful thing, you must agree. And if he stops you writing at all then he's done the best job possible. After all, who wants to read or listen to what some poor old writer has pumped out of his diseased heart when he can read a balanced and reasoned judgement about life, love and literature from an aloof and informed commentator. (pp73/74)

Unlike Paul Slickey, in which Osborne rained countless blows upon the critics, and Under Plain Cover with its pastiche of Third Programme pundit jargon, he here coldly lays into his enemies in a total, none-controlled manner.

West of Suez is constructed along the lines of the conventionally theatrical and bears some resemblance to Chekhov and Shaw. <sup>52</sup> Indeed, Osborne squeezes in a Chekhovian reference (p.51), but there is also evidence of Osborne's lasting affection for the music hall. In the play's early stages, Robert

entertains the assembled company with a parody of an old smoking-room ballad:

She's got chronic menstruation,  
Never laughs, never smiles,  
Mine's a dismal occupation,  
Cracking ice for Grandma's piles.

Even now the baby's started  
Having epileptic fits;  
Everytime it laughs it farts,  
Everytime it farts it shits. (p.29)

which is not unlike Jimmy Porter's patter or indeed the songs of Archie Rice.

However, it seems that Osborne the writer was, by the time of West of Suez, much happier to steer clear of the theatrical settings he relied upon so much in his earlier days. West of Suez was a successful play and it suggested that Osborne's work in the manner of Time Present and The Hotel in Amsterdam was settling into an indentifiable style. It did for about a year, until 10 December 1972, when A Sense of Detachment opened at The Royal Court.

Michael Anderson writes:

Writers who write about writers run the risk of exponentially diminishing returns, and to many critics, West of Suez's successor, A Sense of Detachment, did give the impression of a work by someone whose talents were in disintegration. (53)

It is a play which the author regards more highly:

In 1972...A Sense of Detachment, a play for which it might be gathered I have some affection, was to be produced in very different circumstances to the climate of wounded bafflement of 8 May [(1956), the first night of Look Back in Anger]. Begrudgingly, my rancour had long since been stockpiled, mobilized and had taken up its positions after the disbelief and disarray caused by George's '56 'spring offensive'. In the interval of that 1972 first night, I met a woman in the foyer who had frequented all my first nights for a time. I called her the Witch of Ongar, and she always said the same thing. 'You've done it this time, Osborne, you've really done it to yourself! You've finished it for yourself this time! You've really done it!' The Witch of Ongar has not approached me since then and I miss her.

Almost everyone agreed with her, including the Financial Times: This must surely be his farewell to the theatre.(54)

A Sense of Detachment is totally unlike anything Osborne has produced before or since. He has often veered away from the conventional insofar as much of his output broke new ground, but his plays always had a basic sense of convention about them. (Even The Entertainer and A Bond Honoured, despite somewhat unorthodox staging, were conventional in terms of plot and character. A Sense of Detachment dispenses with any attempts to create theatrical illusion in any orthodox manner; it is clearly not a 'chauffeur-driven' play. It is 'his most unrealistic play',  
55  
having no story, no characters in any accepted sense and no set:

The curtain rises on a virtually empty stage except for a projection screen at the back, a barrel organ downstage and an upright piano. After a slight pause, the principal actors walk on carrying light bentwood chairs. The actors are the CHAIRMAN, a man in his mid-fifties, the CHAP, who is slightly younger, the GIRL, who is younger still, the FATHER, who is about seventy, the GRANDFATHER, who is about ten years older, and the OLDER LADY, who is about the same age. They place their chairs in position and look around them, at each other, the stage and all parts of the auditorium.(p.11)

The dialogue, from the beginning, dispels any possibility that the play is in any kind of conventional mould:

Chairman: Well, this looks like a pretty unpromising opening.

Chap: Blimey, you're telling me. The Stage Management looks more interesting than we do. (p.11)

Such an opening dispels any illusions, at the same time giving a clue that this is an inward looking play: a piece of anti-theatre about the theatre.

As the play develops, this clue is reinforced until it is clear that those on-stage are simply going to present themselves as actors, complemented by two other members of the company placed in the audience: one a disapproving Tory, and the other a drunken, beery football supporter. The action of the play, such as there is of it, consists of a series of insult exchanges between the actors and the audience, which Osborne hopes will become mutually spontaneous, and a discussion of the current theatre. The second act follows with a series of Osbornian diatribes against anything that upsets him; the whole being punctuated with recorded music, poetry and the Older Lady reading extracts from a pornographic catalogue.

It is inevitable that the play will contain many references to the theatre and the world of show-business in general. There are jibes against TV chat shows, theatrical trends, Shakespearian pastiches and theatrical conventions:

Chairman: I shall try to make a beginning.  
 Interrupter: (from auditorium) And about time, I say! (Of sorts) Well, ladies and gentlemen and so on. The programme first, I suppose...Overpriced as usual. Full of useless information. Like what part of Buckinghamshire the actors live in, how many children they've got, what their hobbies are and the various undistinguished television series that they've appeared in. (p.19)

The oddity is that, as a successful dramatist, all of Osborne's plays have been presented in the manner which he is here satirizing, and audiences, in general, like to know about the actors they see. It is part of the fascination of that which lies beyond the pass door, and Osborne, as someone privy to such mysteries, does not seem to realize that they are genuinely of interest to the customers.

Like many of its predecessors, A Sense of Detachment owes something to Osborne's love of the music hall. In particular, the Chap's 'Yankie Doodle Dandy' spot:

Chap: (sings) I'm a Yankie Doodle Dandy  
 Girl: There he goes again.  
 Chap: A Yankee Doodle do or die  
 (All join in)  
 A real live nephew of my Uncle Sam  
 Born on the fourth of July  
 (During this, the Stars and Stripes flutter during the projection screen) (p.25)

Although the sentiment may be different, the manner of presentation of the above is remarkably similar to Archie Rice's act:

The Army, the Navy and the Air Force,  
Are all we need to make the blighters see  
It still belongs to you, the old red, white and blue  
(drop Union Jack)  
Those bits of red still on the map  
We won't give up without a scrap. (pp32/33)

Whereas Archie's number is seedy and pitiful, 'the grisly show  
56  
itself', the scene from A Sense of Detachment is cynical, cheap,  
and its meaning seems lost in the confusion of the moment.

The music hall quality continues with a parody of  
'Widdicombe Fair', in which Osborne squeezes in a selection of  
his fellow contemporary dramatists, to no noticeable purpose  
other than to supplement the in-joke theatricality of the  
occasion:

Harold Pinter, Harold Pinter  
Lend me your grey mare,  
All along, down along, out along lea,  
For I want to go to,  
Printing House Square  
With Arnold Wesker,  
David Storey,  
Edward Albee,  
Must get in an American,  
Charles Wood,  
Charlie Farnsbarns,  
Christopher Hampton,  
Sammy Becket,  
Sammy Someone,  
Edna O'Brien,  
Because she's a woman  
And we're in enough trouble already,  
Old Uncle Sammy Beckett and all,  
And Old Sammy Beckett and all.  
(Repeat verse to a dance) (pp25/26)

A little later, Osborne reverts to a theme first employed in  
Paul Slickey, later lampooned in Under Plain Cover and more



recently blasted in West of Suez: the 'liars and self-deceivers':

(The Chairman clears his throat and becomes the interviewer to all the others)

Chairman: Now, J. Waddington Smith, you've just come from this play tonight. Did you think it came off at all? Or would you call it a total disaster?

Grandfather: Not a total disaster, no. On the other hand...

Girl: On the other hand...

Grandfather: I must confess it did have some enjoyable moments.

Chap: Oh! Say that would you?

Older Lady: I quite enjoyed it. But then I suppose I'm easily pleased. (p.33)

This lacks the originality of the 'Knicker' sketch in Under Plain Cover, and the directness of Gillman's anti-critic pronouncement in West of Suez. Osborne seems to have fallen back on an old device for voicing an old pet hatred, using an in-joke as general entertainment, and failing in the process.

In a review in The Times, Irving Wardle wrote:

You might look at the piece as a terminal point of Osborne's derision, which has now spread from the world outside to the theatrical process itself. (57)

Wardle suggests that the play is inward-looking, which it is. Osborne has been an innovator: Look Back in Anger, The Entertainer, A Patriot for Me all broke new ground in one sense or another. But his dramatic roots seem firmly lodged in the theatrical conventions of the 1950s and his dislike of the over-innovative, as voiced in his anti-happening statements in Time

Present, reached in A Sense of Detachment a practical realisation which fails because he has chosen a genre which he seems to distrust and disbelieve. The play was not a terminal point, but it could easily have been but for Osborne's earlier reputation.

Following A Sense of Detachment, Osborne's work returned to a more conventional format and his next two plays were written for television.

Ms or Jill and Jack is a comedy of manners, the main thrust of the humour emanating from the fact that the roles of the leading performers are inverted. That is to say Jill is a career-conscious successful city business-person who makes all the decisions and, indeed, all the running in her relationship with Jack. Osborne is at pains to point out that there is nothing deviant in their characteristics (p.64) and his comedy is concerned with the social rather than the sexual aspect of their relationship.

The play is not in the least theatrical in the sense that Time Present, which, like Jill and Jack, had Jill Bennett in the leading role, is directly concerned with the stage coterie. However, Jack, the somewhat dizzy and unworldly leading male character, is supposed to be an actor, allowing Osborne to bring to the screen an example of theatrical failure of a slightly different complexion to that of George Dillon:

Jack: I did these two weeks at Watford but I wasn't right for the part, the director hated my guts, none of the London Press bothered to come and the weather kept the customers away to say nothing of the play. I didn't get that modelling job for pipe tobacco which I was depending on to pay for the jacket. (p.75)

and, at the same time, Osborne has a small jibe at his hated 'liars and self-deceivers': 'none of the London Press bothered to come!'

The play also contains some passing references to the London show-business scene: the Covent Garden Crush Bar and Rudolph Nureyev, but such trivia aside, there are few elements within the play which hark back to Osborne's early days.

#### XIV

The same is true of The Gift of Friendship, Osborne's next play, also for television. Indeed, it could be construed from his later output that, as his fame as a dramatist outgrew his much more modest reputation as an actor, his concern in his plays was to examine the world of the writer rather than that of the actor. Certainly, it is the isolation of the writer which is the focus of West of Suez, and a similar literary elder statesman crops up in The Gift of Friendship. Jocelyn Broome, an eminent author well into middle-age, invites Bill Wakely, a rather more youthful and commercially successful contemporary, to dine with him after six years' estrangement. Broome appoints Wakely as his literary executor, and, after Broome dies, Wakely discovers that his

deceased friend despised him. The play's prime concerns are to discuss the nature of friendship and the nature of the writer's lot; neither seems to have much bearing upon the world of the theatre, and the play reflects this. Nevertheless, The Gift of Friendship is not without the occasional theatrical reference.

He discusses a visit to the theatre with his wife, Madge:

Madge: You certainly didn't enjoy the play, tonight.  
Bill: I didn't realise it was obligatory.  
Madge: What? Oh, not that.  
Bill: You know...I've never cared much for plays.  
Madge: For people you mean.  
Bill: Actors aren't normally much like people, I've always thought. (p.18)

but this is more in the vein of an in-joke than a pithy observation concerning the nature of the actor. Similarly, Osborne's love of the conventionally theatrical, or rather his hatred of the deliberately unconventional, is voiced by Broome:

Vivian sent me this book about a certain J.C. - 'just an ordinary cat doing his own thing, who gets caught up with another cat, Judas, an' - what is it - (he reads) - it's on the jacket - 'an idealistic pip plugger worried about his boy. With Pilate, an amiable square who keeps washing his hands to a really fantastic group. Get yourself a cross baby, and just stretch out and turn on..that's after a mind-bursting number called Gethsemane: "God, you're giving me such a time. These old words don't ever rhyme."' Then there's - oh yes - 'Mary Magdalene, like she says just 'screw'. Isn't that great? Followed by visions, sex, you name it. And finally, Brother, together we shall all have out thing in Paradise. So screw your vinegar and hyssop. (p.28)

This seems to be a dose of the normal Osbornian rhetoric,

directed, on this occasion, at the pop-biblical musical genre as typified by Godspell and Jesus Christ, Superstar; a mode of entertainment which would seem to cut across Osborne's currently  
58  
held conservative religious sympathies. However, the underlying theme of The Gift of Friendship is one of bitterness verging on hatred. In the role of literary executor, Wakely is granted access to Broome's unpublished diaries. These reveal the loathing which he felt for Wakely in particular and for mankind in general, and it is this sense of loathing which spills over in Osborne's next work.

## XV

The End of My Old Cigar is about the hatred of mankind. Lady Regine Frimley, an aristocrat who has risen from a Hackney childhood through the ranks, runs her stately home as a high class brothel; tending the needs of the wealthy and influential, at the same time recording, on film, their exploits in order to further the liberation of womankind and to end male domination. Such a plot, like that of, for example, The Blood of the Bambergs and The Right Prospectus, is, at the very least, surreal and its improbability paves the way for a great deal of humour, especially in the early stages. However, much of this humour is delivered via the medium of obscene language, which, in the same manner as Rachel Kempson's recitations from the blue-movie and marital aids catalogue in A Sense of Detachment, attempts to amuse by shock tactics rather than wit:

Regine: See it dangle, dingle dangle, jingle jangle in its usual petulant pendulance. A sorry, blue-veined pork sword looking like an unripe, yellowish stilton. Lying against its horse-hair sock, wee babe, of a million million pestilent tadpoles looking for a muddy pool to nest in. Throbbing for all the world's distaste like a turkey's gobbling neck.

Stella: No wonder they call it a 'gobble job'.

Regine: Erect, well now, that's a sight, if they can get it up without your thumbs splitting and fingers enflamed with corns, more horn than they could ever manage with that. Erect as an Irish volunteer, blind, hopeless, eyeless in girl's Gaza. Those footling frail inches of phallus, trying to ascend Everest like a Mick navvy without enough scaffolding. (p.23)

It is apparent that Osborne is revelling in the literary liberty which the removal of the Lord Chamberlain's encumbrances allows him.

The setting of the play is entirely conventional and harks back to the drawing room of the 'chauffeur-driven' theatre:

Scene: Frimley House

The sitting room of a large country house. It should be very large. Jacobean, perhaps, with Knole sofas. Anyway, whatever period, furnished in the most circumspect taste and careful-careless luxury, reflecting a little on the extravagant nature of its owner, Lady Regine Frimley. There are huge, elaborate mirrors everywhere. (p.11)

A totally conventional introduction which is very similar to that which Osborne lampoons in The World of Paul Slickey and which is representative of a genre, the passing of which is mourned in Time Present.

And if the setting is out of the Osborne catalogue, so are the characters:

As for the characters, we find Osborne, as usual, crowding the stage with types he thinks Britain could best do without. Who are they this time? There is the usual quota of 'disjointed actresses'; a profiteering producer; an MP; Fleet Street mogul - the same old crowd. (59)

and there is also a 'liar and self-deceiver', Stratford West, an 'awful, creepy show-biz journalist'. (p.26)

Like many that have gone before them, the play's characters hover on the fringes of the theatre. There is much bitchy actress-talk and, at the opening of the play, Regine sings to a recording of Der Rosenkavalier, lending an apposite theatrical tone to the proceedings.

The play has two crucial points: firstly, Regine is given an Osbornian state-of-the-nation four page declaration of her own intent, and secondly, one of Regine's ladies, Mrs. Isobel Sands, and a customer, Leonard Grimthorpe, are paired off and, much against the original intentions, fall in love.

Regine's speech is like Bill Maitland's verbal torrent to his daughter, very much an observation point for the audience to witness the latest Osborne views. He 'has a go', once more, at his hated critics: 'he writes to obscure journals like The Listener which specialize in vindictiveness' (p.34). And he voices his usual views on the current theatrical trends:

You're safe with theatre chat because no-one knows anything about it and cares less. Cinema is more dodgy because some of them are practically archivists and, anyway, it often digs deep into their grubby schoolboy consciousness. Say the theatre is dead - as always - except the Fringe or Underground. You don't need to have seen any. They won't have seen any either. Or they'll have fallen asleep. (p.34)

The extended love scene between Isobel and Leonard takes over from where the poignant **statement** of affection between Laurie and Annie in The Hotel in Amsterdam leaves off, but not only does it look back to the 1960s, it looks back to the very early days of Osborne's playwriting career, for what cements their relationship is a love of music hall:

Isobel: I think we might be a couple of sparrows.  
Len: So do I, you know (hums)  
'Singing like a sparrow on the top of a tree!  
There is she'.  
Isobel: There is he. Waving of their handkerchiefs.  
Len: ) (together) 'Singing like two sparrows on the  
Isobel) top of a tree!  
Len: Fancy you knowing that!  
Isobel: Fancy you knowing it. Bit before both of our  
times.  
Len: Music hall. You liked that.  
Isobel: Some women actually enjoy jokes too you know. (p.48)

So one of Osborne's latest plays has as a crucial point a theme which is first met when George Dillon plays the cocktail cabinet for Ruth, when Jimmy Porter and Cliff do their Flanagan and Allen act to escape from the tedium of bedsitter life, and when Phoebe Rice captures her sole moment of glory, stepping from the shadow cast by her self-centred, failing husband, to sing The Boy I Love...



## XVI

The latest Osborne stage play to be produced is Watch It Come Down, which was first performed at the National Theatre on 24 February 1976. The play has a certain familiarity: Irving Wardle wrote:

To those who have followed John Osborne's work over the past ten years, the plot of his latest piece will come as no surprise. A group of friends, recoiling from everything and everybody outside their own company, go to ground in a moneyed retreat where, after sessions of mutual bitching and catalogues of social discontent, their fears of the outside world are bloodily confirmed.

As usual, they consist of middle-aged art community emigres...(60)

The group is strongly similar to those who went to Amsterdam for the weekend and West of Suez for Christmas. The leading figure, Ben, is a film director and he lives, along with his wife, a dying writer, and sundry other friends, in a converted railway station.

It is as much a retreat from the outside world as is the safety of the world beyond the pass door to the theatrical coterie, but just as Archie Rice's safety is threatened by the real world, in the shape of the tax man, so Ben and his friends are threatened by their rural neighbours, who resent the presence of such a group of artistic trendies.

Bearing in mind the nature of the characters, it is not surprising that the dialogue contains a significant number of theatrical and show-business references, particularly during the vicious marital bickering between Ben and Sally:

- Ben: Men may become little boys but women never become little girls. It's why they lack the charm of a past life.
- Sally: Oh good! Sounds very appealing to the slaving males from the nose-job and mouth, twenty-year-old, plastic tit and bum dolly in your next carnival of melancholy movie. I can just see it. It's your wallet they're after, diddums, not your paunch, flabby old wrinkle and profile in depth, sight and sound.
- Ben: You're the one who can't face the future.
- Sally: At least I don't mewl over the past, playing pat-a-cake with my past, saying I'm an artist.
- Ben: I've never called myself an artist and you know it.
- Sally: Well, you act the part - very badly, I may say. Heavy performance. (yawns)
- Ben: I've told you, I'm not even second rate. I'm third rate and pretty suspect at that. (p.28)

The terms of theatricality, which are truly part of Ben's life, spill over and infuse the everyday dialogue of both himself and his wife.

Structurally, the play would be as at home in the 1950s as the 1970s. There is a conventional, if rather ambitious, set which is explained in the text with the usual Osborne attention to detail:

The action takes place in two separated areas of what was once a country railway station. At the back of the larger section is the door leading to the platform and station, which can just be seen through one of the windows. Also deep countryside in distance. On one side, what was once the

booking office has become a dining-room hatch. The main part of the set is obviously what was once the entrance to the station and waiting room. The smaller section, separated by a door, may have once been the parcels office...(p.9)

Moreover, the play falls neatly into two acts with a ferociously violent ending to the first and an even more violent, even cataclysmic ending to the second, at which point the audience is invited to watch the structure of the set and the structure of society come down. The conventional division of the play, with the action rising to a peak at each curtain, is a clear reminder of the author's background. Indeed, if the dialogue were to be tempered to remove that which the abolition of censorship has allowed, there is little in Watch It Come Down to separate it from Look Back in Anger save that Jimmy, in growing into Ben, has earned a little money, collected a few friends and moved into the country.

## XVII

John Osborne's most recently produced new work is You're Not Watching Me Mummy, a play for television originally scheduled to be broadcast in July 1979, but because of an industrial  
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dispute the broadcast was delayed until January 1980. It is a play which owes a great deal to early Osborne insofar as it is set inside a West End Theatre, indeed backstage in such a theatre, and it is populated by thinly sketched caricatures who are over-shadowed by the central figure, on this occasion, an actress, Jemima. Its roots can be seen in both George Dillon,

with its wafer-thin supporting characters like Colwyn-Stuart and, particularly appropriately, Barney Evans, and in The Entertainer, which displays the less attractive aspects of the theatrical profession; although Jemima's lifestyle is more glamorous than Archie Rice's, even the pinnacle of West End glory is seen to have numerous drawbacks.

Set as it is, the play abounds with theatrical references, most of them used by Osborne to voice once more his dislike of his many pet hates. In the early stages of the play, scene six is a reminder that the 'chauffeur-driven' theatre of Osborne's early days is still with us:

EXTERIOR, NIGHT. SHAFTESBURY AVENUE

The audience are beginning to come out in force. Chauffeurs open car doors for their owners.

Chauffeur: Enjoy it, Madam?  
Lady: (getting into car) She's superb, absolutely superb.

and the favourite of all Osborne's pet hates, the critics, come in for a double dose of vitriol. Freddie, the critic who appears in the play, is described in the most unattractive terms. 'A short, middle-aged man in owlish spectacles has entered. He has a withered arm'. (p.37) Such a description is far from flattering and the presence of a withered arm implies that he is himself poisoned by his own death-dealing writing. A little later, the anti-critic invective becomes more personal and more direct:

Klob: I've read your biography several times and there are one or two points I would like to take up with you.

Freddie: Of course.

Klob: I expect you know that you are very much admired in the States. Of course, we do have Clive Barnes.

Freddie: Sound chap.

Susan: On the contrary, he's a fat, deviating slob, a third-rate ballet reviewer masquerading as a tenth-rate Broadway Butcher. (p.39)

Several other theatrical institutions are attacked: the National Theatre - 'Colditz-on-Thames' (p.17) - which had been the site of two significant Osborne disappointments, A Bond Honoured and Watch it Come Down; and the radical political theatre against which Osborne first spoke out in Time Present. In You're Not Watching Me Mummy it is the Gay Sweatshop which comes under Osborne's fire:

Knob: May I ask you a question, Miss Rogers?

Lena: Please.

Klob: Would it be safe to describe you as a socialist?

Lena: Yes.

Klob: Marxist?

Lena: Yes.

Klob: I see. And would you also say that you were militant Women's Lib?

Lena: Like most intelligent people, yes.

Klob: And would you say that both themes form a running counterpoint in your play?

Lena: Well...

Klob: ...Tell me, have you ever considered writing a play for the Gay Sweatshop? (pp29/30)

In fact, the play is largely composed of short scenes, like those quoted above, which Osborne uses to put across individual fragments of his philosophy. In that respect, and bearing in mind the flatness of his characters, the play fails to cling

together. In his Sunday Times review, Russell Davies wrote:

This was a berserk windmilling attack on - well you couldn't say theatre. The kind of thing that happens in theatrical dressing rooms perhaps. That was what was shown. The sad thing is that one could have made it up oneself. (62)

However, at the core of the play, Jemima remains a sympathetic figure. As her dressing room fills up with more and more unwanted guests, she slips away home having put in a hard evening's work. Osborne's love of the real theatre shows through. His venom is reserved for the hangers-on, the 'liars and self-deceivers', the thesis-writers and those who arrive in their chauffeur-driven limousines; the real theatre, the George Dillons, the Archie Rices and, on this occasion, Jemima, is accorded his approval. His love of the theatre shows through.

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35. See Shakespeare, The Tempest, Act 4, Sc.1, 1.148.
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## CHAPTER THREE

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### THE ACTORS

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#### I

The point is made in the first chapter of this thesis that it is inevitable that plays which are set in the theatre will contain many characters who are actors (and this is true of Osborne, particularly in George Dillon, The Entertainer, Time Present and You're Not Watching Me Mummy.) However, in the case of Osborne, the creation of actor roles is not confined to plays about the theatre. His own view of the process of creating a play was stated in 1961:

But it's still true that the theatre comes first for me as a writer. As an actor? Well, I always enjoy acting, and if I were offered a really good part I'd be tempted. But I've never taken myself seriously as an actor, and neither has anyone else. It would be a bit self indulgent to do it any more! Of course, when I'm writing I see all the parts being played beautifully by me, to perfection! (1)

This is to suggest that the actor in Osborne is an influential factor in his dramatic writings and with this in mind it is easy to appreciate why so many of his plays contain virtuosos, highlyactable roles which have, in the past, attracted great actors.

The significance of many such roles is that, although they do not portray characters who are actors by profession, these characters do display a great many of the traits normally

associated with the actor. These actor-types - Jimmy Porter, Martin Luther, Laurie - are as typically Osbornian as Archie Rice and Pamela, with the same flair for the good story and that assumption of a persona which is a hallmark of the stage performer.

The aim within this chapter is to examine a number of Osborne's leading characters who display this actorly quality. Firstly, those characters who are actors will be examined and, in the second part of the chapter, it is intended to discuss those characters who, although they earn their livings by working outside the theatre, many of whose characteristics derive from a sense of performance, and this renders them very close in nature to the actor. For this purpose, they shall continue to be labelled 'actor types'.

## II

Archie Rice, in The Entertainer, is the only one of Osborne's actors whom the author has chosen to display during a genuine performance. Of the thirteen music hall numbers which make up the play, five are Archie's spots. These weak song-and-dance routines show Archie's music hall career slowly crumbling in parallel with the music hall itself. 'Don't clap too hard,' he begs the audience, 'it's a very old building' (p.59), bringing together the decay of the tradition and the rottenness of his act.

As an actor, Osborne's job consisted in large measure of acquiring the sympathy of the audience. In creating the role of Archie Rice he has had to challenge his actor instincts and produce a character who, in his front-cloth scenes at least, sets himself apart from his audience and who, despite his sometimes pathetic nature, fails to win over his public. He achieves this by making Archie, the performer, an automaton; his act lacks that spark of personal and unique creativity that made, for example, Osborne's much-loved Max Miller great. At the beginning of number seven:

Archie rises, his face held open by a grin and dead behind the eyes. Just now and then, for a second or two, he gives the tiniest indication that he is almost surprised to find himself where he is. (p.59)

Entertaining is, for Archie, just a job, a labour for which he has no longer any love or enthusiasm. Indeed, when offered attractive employment in Canada, Archie claims that it is not love of the theatre that keeps him in England, but the fact that 'you can't get draught Bass in Toronto'. (p.84)

This derision which he feels for his audience is implied, with progressively increasing force, during Archie's routines, but the point is made much more explicitly during the domestic scenes:

No, it wasn't all right at the theatre. Monday night there were sixty sad little drabs in, and tonight there were about two hundred sad little drabs. If we open on Monday night at

West Hartlepool, it will be by very reluctant agreement of about thirty angry people. (p.36)

Archie despises his customers, but there is irony in Osborne's writing. The audience listening to these words have just been acting the role of the 'sad little drab', and nobody likes to be so labelled.

Unsuccessful as he may be, Archie conforms very closely to the type of actor discussed in Chapter One. His language in the domestic scenes is flamboyantly spiced with actorly mannerisms; his first appearance at home is executed in much the same way as his act:

Ay, ay, women's legs again! (to the others) That's what Sterne calls riding your tit with sobriety. I think it was Sterne anyway. Or was it George Robey? (p.34)

and a little later, when relating how the devious Tax Man caught up with him in 1936:

Bad luck, that's all. I was trapped in hospital with a double hernia. Very nasty it was too. Terribly complicated. I even thought all my plans for the future were going to be finished at one point. Anyway, that's another story. I'll tell you sometime. I was lying there on my back, wondering whether draught Bass on its own was enough to make life worth living, when two men in bowlers and raincoats sprang at me from behind the screens. That was Archie's own downfall. Could have happened to anyone. I think the ward sister must have tipped them off. She used to tell me she was very spiritual, so she probably did. I'd gone legit. for a while just then, and I'd been in The Tale of Two Cities. When I told her, she said 'Oh yes, I think I've heard of that - (to Billy). She was an Irish lady. A Tale of Two Cities - isn't it about Sodom or Gomorrah? (Jean smiles -

Billy and Phoebe are no longer listening.) A lady in the pit thought that was quite funny tonight. (pp.38/39)

Archie's compulsion to perform at home is paralleled by the increasing effect which his decaying domestic circumstances have upon his professional abilities until, in the final scene, his two worlds come together. Archie is helped off-stage by Phoebe and the end of his performance is marked by the merging failure of his professional and domestic circumstances. He is helped off to obscurity.

### III

'You're a good audience..That's all I need - an audience', says George Dillon (p.62) to Ruth, in a sense which almost echoes the dying falls of The Entertainer. Archie Rice needed an audience to survive; the theatre failed him and he found his audience at home. George Dillon, the failed actor, still needs an audience to sustain him but, unlike Archie, he does not even have the chance of a real theatrical audience. Instead he has to make do with the Elliot household.

In a sense, The Entertainer and Epitaph for George Dillon move in opposite directions. Archie Rice, at the beginning of the play, is hardly a success, but by the end he has failed totally. George Dillon, on the other hand, is a failed actor throughout the play, but at the hands of Barney Evans he achieves considerable commercial reward. Nevertheless, in

aesthetic terms, both Archie and George are failures.

George Dillon is introduced into the text with a typically specific - almost unrealisable - Osbornian stage direction:

George Dillon enters. He is a little over thirty, boyish, yet still every inch his age. He is short, not good looking but with an anti-romantic kind of charm. He displays at different times a mercurial, ironic passion, lethargy, offensiveness, blatant sincerity and a mentally picaresque dishonesty - sometimes almost all of these at the same time. A walking conflation in fact. Just at the moment he is rather shy, feeling his way. (p.29)

This is clearly an actor writing a part to be played beautifully by himself - 'to perfection'. Indeed, there is a strong biographical element within the play - an actor finding greater success as a playwright! In terms of the introductory stage direction, it must be assumed that Osborne the actor/dramatist knows what he means and that he could put it into practice, but for an actor to interpret all of the above poses enormous problems. Such stage directions are largely irrelevant, as the nature of George emerges through his own and others' dialogue. However, what Osborne's instructions do tell us is that George, the actor, is a complex, multi-faceted character displaying all of the ambivalence noted in the first chapter of this thesis.

That George is acting a role; that he has something to hide - his failure - becomes apparent in the early stages:



Mrs E: You've got your acting and your plays and I don't know what, haven't you?  
George: Oh, yes Mrs Elliot, don't worry - the play I'm writing now is just about in the bag. I can finish it in no time here. And I've already got someone interested in it - for the West End, I mean.  
(p.34)

This is, of course, untrue. It is an act, and the audience is aware of this, but it adds to the fascination of a character who, after a big build-up, appears on-stage in a wholly inappropriate setting and begins to wriggle out of his embarrassment by exaggerating the potential value of his play.

This first act ends in an almost melodramatic fashion. Having just learned that the Elliot's son was killed in the war:

(George rises and walks round the room restlessly, looking at the photographs on the wall, the cocktail cabinet, the general dressings. He then picks up the photograph of Raymond and looks at it steadily.)

George: You stupid looking bastard.  
(quick curtain) (p.35)

Not only is this dramatically effective - the audience will make their way to the bar quite bemused by the complexity of the character they have just met - but in a more ironic sense, George is looking at a photograph of a role he is shortly to assume. As the play progresses, he replaces Raymond in the Elliot menage and George is subconsciously commenting that he is about to become a 'stupid looking bastard'.



At the beginning of the second act, some three months later, George's actorly characteristics are further revealed. The Elliot household has recently acquired a telephone which, in true theatrical convention, gets the action off to a start by ringing:

Josie: It's for you, Mum. Ever such a funny man - he's got a sort of Chinese accent.  
Mrs E: Chinese?  
Josie: Yes.  
Mrs E: But I don't know any Chinamen  
Josie: Well, you'd better hurry up an answer it, Mum - he's waiting.  
Norah: Perhaps he's from Chu Chin Chow on Ice.  
(Mrs E. goes into hall, and picks up receiver)  
Mrs E: Hello, yes it is (Josie stands in doorway, listening). Have we what? Well, I don't know, I'll see (To Josie) He wants to know if we've got any laundry that wants doing. (In phone) No, I don't think so, thank you. What are you laughing at? (She laughs) Oh you are a naughty boy, you really are - you took us all in (To Josie) It's George.  
Josie: Oh, silly (She goes into kitchen)  
Mrs E: What's that dear? Have you? Oh, I am pleased. Yes, oh we will! All right, dear. Goodbye. (Replaces receiver - goes into sitting room) Says he's got some good news - he's got a job, and something about his play. I didn't quite catch what it was. Fancy young George being the first to ring up - and I had it put in specially for him too - Isn't that nice. (p.36/37)

This short exchange reveals a great deal about George, and it is accomplished in the same tantalizing manner as the early part of the play, without him being there. Now, the use of a telephone to assist with the action of a play is commonplace, and would certainly have featured regularly in the working life of Osborne the provincial actor. (Indeed, Osborne the dramatist used the telephone as a major element of Inadmissible Evidence.) In this instance, the telephone is used to denote some change in the state of affairs in the Elliot household which has taken place

between Acts One and Two, although this is not made immediately clear. However, following the initial exchange of dialogue over the telephone, it is quickly made apparent that George is fully conforming to the type of behaviour expected of the actor. In a manner similar to that of Archie Rice, who continues to perform when he leaves the stage to go home, George Dillon, the failed actor who has no stage, must perform to his only available audience, the Elliot family. The performance he gives, the first of several during the course of the play, is a private one for his adoptive mother figure, Mrs. Elliot. As to its quality, one can only guess via the reactions of Josie and Mrs. Elliot - and they are hardly discerning critics of the drama. Furthermore, this episode also reveals that George's presence in the Elliot household is assuming a permanency which was not apparent in Act One; the telephone has been installed for his benefit.

George Dillon's cheap theatricality is made visual when he makes his second act entrance:

(George appears at the French window, waving a bottle of wine.)

George: Friends, Romans and countrymen, lend me your ears!

Mrs. E. Oh, George! You did make me jump! (George goes up and hugs her) And I'm so pleased about your job dear - we're all dying to hear about it.

Josie: Where is it George, Drury Lane?

George: Could be, Josie, could be! Come on Norah, cheer up and find the corkscrew for the big Bacchanalia.

Mrs. E. I'll find it. (Goes to cocktail cabinet)

George: Cast of thousands, ten years in the making. Starring the one and only Mrs. Elliot as Juno!  
(p.39)

This enforced bonhomie is full of the performed bravado of the actor escaping from reality. The exaggerated entrance via the French windows - why did he not use the front door? - the grating misquotation from Julius Caesar and the semi-risque bawdy are all cheap tricks. But they are the cheap tricks of a third-rate actor, deliberately played there by one who knows. Osborne has made George perform from behind a mask that is wafer thin.

However, George's facade is to be stripped away. Later in Act Two, he reveals more of his passion for the theatre and the reason for his failure than has been possible whilst he has been hiding behind his performance.

Ruth: Are you any good, George?  
George: (Almost like a child) That's a woman's question.  
Ruth: As you like.  
George: Well, ask yourself. Isn't it? Listen: All I ever get - inside and outside the theatre - is the raves of a microscopic minority and the open hostility of the rest. I attract hostility. I seem to be on heat for it. Whenever I slip out on to these boards - immediately, from the very first moment I show my face - I know I've got to fight almost every one of these people in the auditorium. Right from the stalls to the gallery, to the vestal virgins in the boxes! My God, it's a gladiatorial combat! Me against them! Me and the almighty Them! Oh, I may win some of them over. Sometimes it's a half maybe, sometimes a third, sometimes it's not even a quarter. But I do beat them down. I beat them down! And even in the hatred of the majority, there's a kind of triumph because I know that, although they'd never admit it, they secretly respect me.  
Ruth: What about this film your going to be in?  
George: It doesn't mean a thing. The old line, you know? Keep in touch - we'll let you know. You don't understand, do you?  
Ruth: I just don't see much virtue in trying to ignore failure.  
George: There's no such thing as failure - just waiting for success.(pp. 56/57)

These lines expose the failed actor. George Dillon is unsuccessful for the same reason as Archie Rice; he challenges the audience in gladiatorial combat, establishing a relationship of hatred such as Archie has with his 'sad little drabs'. Moreover, his attitude to his position is the enforced optimism of the struggling artist; failure is outside his field of concepts, success is simply a matter of time. In reality, of course, he is deluding himself; he is really resigned to failure.

This acceptance of failure is manifest in the resentment which he feels for the Elliot family. As an artist, albeit unsuccessful, he does not feel that he belongs with them. But he cannot afford to leave and they press like a blanket upon his creative spirit. Acting a part is his means of momentary escape and his reality becomes absorbed into his performance:

Ruth: I'm beginning not to know when you're being real and when you're not. (p.64)

As an actor, George Dillon conforms to the typical mould of the Osborne hero: articulate, socially aware and amusing in a vitriolic manner. It is a virtuoso role presenting a fine opportunity for a young actor - Robert Stephens in 1958 and Richard Kane in a major revival at the Young Vic in 1972. It is not, however, unlike Osborne's earlier work, and much of his later work, as a one-man show. Ruth provides a foil for George. It is she, alone amongst a supporting cast of cardboard cut-outs, who, as his intellectual and experiential equal, creates

the condition for George's full exposure and his coming to terms with his own artistic failure.

#### IV

Of Osborne's four professional actors cast in leading roles, the latter pair are female: Pamela in Time Present and Jemima in You're Not Watching Me Mummy. There is a degree of similarity between the ladies, but Pamela, who appeared some ten years after George Dillon, provides a link between the failure of George and Archie Rice and the roaring success of Jemima.

Pamela is not a failure; indeed the atmosphere of the play, with its enforced champagne bonhomie, suggests that she is hovering on the fringe of greatness, but, like Archie Rice, who recalls the greatness of his father's skill, so Pamela is besotted by the memory of her father, Gideon Orme. Her actress personality pervades the play, although she refrains from overt reference to her own theatrical skill. What she does admit to is a purist's devotion to the theatre:

I've no ambitions. I've told you: I love acting. I'm not so keen on rehearsals. I don't wish to be judged or categorised or watched. I don't want to be pronounced upon or do it for anyone. (p.59)

Hidden behind that minor attack upon the critics so despised by the author, is a simple, unabashed statement of Pamela's commitment to her profession; a statement which harks back to

George Dillon's high ideals which he has to ignore in order to survive.

The real actress quality which emerges from Pamela is the gift of rhetoric. In this respect she is in the same mould as the majority of the Osborne leading characters who precede her, in particular, her acidulous scorn for the youthful vigour of the 1960s is strongly reminiscent of Bill Maitland:

Pamela: What's this?

Constance: Something I'm working on during the recess! Can I have it back, please? It's not interesting.

Pamela: Then why are you working on it? 'Striding into the Seventies with Labour!' You're really joking!

Constance: Please, Pamela. (Pause)

Pamela: Bit like school isn't it? Please can I have my satchel back? And then they throw it over the hedge for you. (She gives it back) Striding into the Seventies. I haven't got used to hobbling about in the sixties yet. Give us a chance. (pp. 32/33)

Like George Dillon, who fails to come to terms with life in the Elliot menage, Bill Maitland and Pamela are unable to come to terms with life in the swinging sixties. Pamela survives this problem by, in true actorly fashion, forming a division, creating a fourth wall between herself and her surroundings which, in the traditional Osbornian manner, is a barrier of vitriolic wit and rhetoric:

Pamela: If I had a son, I wouldn't have a clue what I'd want him to be. I don't mean like an engine driver or something futile like an astronaut or a star export manager. I mean would he prefer champagne to drugs. I mean, I wonder about your child. Will he get stoned...?



Constance: I believe the statistics suggest it's more likely than his going to a university.

Pamela: Oh, he'll go to a university. If you've got 'A' levels, we're after you. And even if you've only got 'O' levels, we're still interested. Fancy, lower streams of the poor little devils, upper levels of the bigger fish. I'd be in no stream at all. All these school inspectors and examiners and seducers from industry hanging about like men in raincoats, offering prospects and excitement and increments. How awful. If a man comes up to you, darling, however friendly he might be, talking about your 'A' levels, don't, repeat don't, talk to him. He's after you, he wants to make a University Challenger out of you. Don't talk to them, they're sick. Yes, but Mummy's known it for a long time. Get back home before the park gates close or he'll take out his careers section in the Daily Telegraph and show it to you. Come home and you can have crumpets and champagne for tea with Mummy...(p.40)

This is a typical Osborne oratory, and it does not require an actress to perform it. It is clearly reminiscent of the very earliest Osborne; indeed Alan Carter draws a direct line between  
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Pamela and Jimmy Porter. Nevertheless, Pamela is an actress and this is reflected in some of the rhetoric she delivers:

He's the one who made that little play I was in sound so wanting and full of painful silences and hauntingly expressed, delicate agonies, or something. Kept them away in droves. Mind you, it was a bit wanting, all greys and browns and sort of obsessed with being rarefied and staring you out with austerity. I got good notices, especially from him. I knew I would, it was a sympathetic, bearing down part. All I had to do was upstage myself and keep a straight back. Sounds like cricket doesn't it. I got stuff about my repose and troubled enchantment and the impression of a powerful intelligence in perfect unison. (pp.70/71)

Moreover, in a manner which recalls the manner in which both Archie and George live and lie in their domestic circumstances, Pamela hides her personal difficulties behind a facade which is,

in fact, quite easily pierced. She lies about her age - I'm thirty four...twenty six years old...' (p.44) - and in the second act, when she has been 'put in the Club' Barney-Evans-style, she refers to her prospective abortionist as a purveyor of 'Ladies Services' (p.60), preferring to assume a role of mock respectability, to live a metaphor, rather than live the truth.

In Time Present, Osborne provides another actress, albeit something of a caricature, to balance the finely detailed portrait of the failing Pamela. She is, in Pamela's words, 'a whopping, enduring, ironclad, guaranteed star!' (pp.38/39) and, as such, she presages the appearance, some eleven years later, of Jemima in You're Not Watching Me Mummy. Abigail appears for only a short time in Act Two, but all of her appearance is, in itself, a performance. She actually wears a jokey stage costume:

Abigail is dressed in men's Carnaby Street clothes. She also wears a theatrical moustache. It is almost possible to mistake her for a man at just one glance, but only just. (p.74)

Abigail is costumed to avoid fans which her new-found fame has thrust upon her, and her over-theatrical pose has an excessive quality which emphasises the falseness of her nature. She gushes effusively, revelling in her own glory:

Abigail: Well, I couldn't get out of my dressing room for hours. Then we finally got to this party. They were getting a bit narked I think, but it was lovely when we got there. Oh, everyone was so happy.. Somehow, good things, well they simply change everyone, don't they? I mean they do.



Everyone was just pleased and happy and I didn't care what happened. Then we left finally. Eddie drove us down to get the papers. Though everyone said we needn't bother. And, of course, it was super. We all went back, well some of us, to Eddie's and we just went dotty all night. Eddie and I didn't go to bed at all.

Constance: How do you feel?

Abigail: Wonderful! Oh, I do think people are really it. Absolutely. I do! Oh, champagne, how delicious. So, yes, we had champagne and eggs with it for breakfast. And he said let's go out and buy anything we want. We're loaded. We can have anything we want. And, oh, so we did. We bought pictures and rugs and I bought a lovely ring and Eddie bought a fabulous cigarette lighter. Oh, we went to galleries and I bought some clothes. Then Eddie said we must have lunch at the Caprice. We hadn't booked a table and it was packed but we just walked in. (p.76)

The irony which hovers over Abigail's torrent of self-congratulation is that, while all her celebrations have been taking place, she should have been reading a lesson at the memorial service for Gideon Orme. With this device, Osborne directs the sympathy away from the artificiality of Abigail firmly in the direction of Pamela. Despite her vitriolic manner and her besotted adoration for the dead theatre of her father, she, like Archie Rice before her, is shaped by Osborne into the figure at the centre of the audience's attention and sympathy, leaving Abigail, so representative of a generation with which Pamela and Osborne cannot fully identify, to catch a taxi, return to the theatre, and carry on with the show.

## V

Jemima, in You're Not Watching Me Mummy, also carries on with the

show. She is a whopping, enduring, ironclad, guaranteed star' but unlike Abigail she is used to it. She has been successful for some time and, in the play, she is currently the female lead in a West End Smash Hit. The delight of a dressing room full of admirers fills her with horror:

Jemima: . Why, why do they come round? Just sitting there, as if they expected something to really happen in here after you've knocked your arse off for three and a half hours. Staring, saying nothing, waiting, helpless, the world seems to be full of them. We sloshed our blood all over the stage for them and what do they do? Sit and wait for a drink! (p.18)

All she really wants to do, accordingly to Hinchcliffe, is 'go<sup>4</sup> home, have a cup of Ovaltine and go to bed'. Eventually, she manages to achieve this, leaving her dresser, Leslie, to collect up the glasses and tidy up for the night, but not until she has endured the presence of a typical crowd of dressing room visitors.

Jemima is drawn by Osborne as a sympathetic character. As an actress, she displays the style of Pamela as well as the trappings of success, albeit more matured, of Abigail. Moreover, although she resents the presence of the audience in her dressing room, seeking to preserve the barrier of mystery which divides back-stage from front-of-house, she is fully conscious, as a dedicated actress, of the loyalty to her audience which her position demands:

10. Interior. Night. Theatre Stage.  
Aubrey and Jemima bowing.

Aubrey: (Smiling at audience. Lips not moving). Goodnight!  
Silly, tasteless bastards. Come on, I want my  
grub. Bastards. (Smiling more than ever). Crass  
Nips, Krauts and Yankees! give us your money and  
piss off 'ome.  
(Aubrey waves, curtain falls.)

11. Interior. Night. Stage.  
The actors trail off to the prompt corner.

Jemima: If you feel that much contempt, I don't know why  
you bother.  
Aubrey: I need the bread, mate. And my stomach's rumbling.  
Jemima: I heard it all through the last act. So did the  
audience I expect.  
Aubrey: Best thing they heard tonight.  
Jemima: Listen, they're not all fools, you know.  
Aubrey: No?  
Jemima: I should lay off the grub a bit too. Your paunch  
is quite repellent in that jacket.  
Aubrey: At least I've got something to snuggle up to. All  
these boring diets of yours.  
Jemima: You're an actor. Or supposed to be. Try and  
remember it. Besides, it's disloyal to the  
audience.  
Aubrey: Disloyal! To them! Vultures. (p.13)

Jemima's rather laudable attitude is in stark contrast to  
Aubrey's. He, like Archie Rice and George Dillon, despises his  
audiences whereas Jemima is fully conscious of the position to  
which her audience has elevated her and she is prepared to admit  
her responsibility in that regard.

Like her actor predecessors, Jemima is at the centre of the  
play, but unlike Archie, George and Pamela, she does not dominate  
it. She has the occasional passage of Osbornian rhetoric and she  
is very much an Osborne mouthpiece in that she is the vehicle via  
which he can attack 'all his favourite dislikes; the Marxist-

women's Lib author, the critic, the research student, an old school chum...and many more!<sup>5</sup> However, she is far from being in the tradition of the star role for the virtuoso performance. In fact, what Jemima does represent is a mature Osborne's statement that life at or near the top of the theatrical profession is not as glamorous as perhaps George or Archie might have thought. As a genuinely industrious and dedicated actress she tolerates the champagne coterie with which she is surrounded, and, when she eventually slips away, the party continues, suggesting that Osborne believes that the authentic life of the artist is working hard and going home, leaving the tinsel for the 'liars and self-deceivers'.

## VI

In Anger and After, John Russell Taylor writes:

The outlook for the young dramatist must have looked fairly grim around the beginning of 1956. There was hardly a straw in the wind, since it would have been an optimist indeed who relied too strongly on the English Stage Company or Theatre Workshop to save the day. Anyway, managers and critics would ask each other periodically, where was the new dramatic talent to be found? And what sort of reception would the public give it if and when it did emerge? - none too enthusiastic if the experience of Whiting and Cannan was anything to go by. Then on 8 May 1956 came the revolution...(6)

Whilst it is not denied that some sort of revolution came at about that time, to claim that it occurred as the result of the first performance of one play is too simplistic a view. The staging of Look Back in Anger was just one in a series of

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important theatrical events which took place at that time, the resultant amalgam of theatrical activity constituting the revolution. The success of Look Back in Anger was simply one cog in the wheel of change that began to turn in mid-decade. Nevertheless, there is a body of opinion which, like Taylor, subscribes to the view that the play is of particular and critical importance.

Doubt exists regarding its lasting value as a piece of drama rather than a piece of theatrical history, and this may affect its current standing. Taylor, in his Casebook, raised this question in 1968:

Finally, there is the inescapable question of where the play stands in critical estimation now. The easiest and most obvious answer is that it doesn't. Coherent critical revolution tends to be contingent on some obvious occasion. Such an occasion might be provided if, for instance, - it is not entirely impossible - the National Theatre were to put on a full dress revival. That would force the critics to think again, to come to terms with their immediate reactions to the play in the late 1960's instead of inclining to refer back mentally to the way it all seemed then and presume, as it is human nature to do, that their first reactions remain valid. (8)

In that same year, the Royal Court staged such a production, directed by Anthony Page with Victor Henry as Jimmy Porter. Of this revival, Irving Wardle wrote:

Legends have a habit of outgrowing their sources, and it was a bold move to restage the play at its parent theatre when it could well have provided an extinct volcano merely recalling the old days when there were only two posh Sunday papers and skirts came down to the knee.

As it turns out, Look Back in Anger stands up to the revival with a vitality that withstands the passage of time as easily as it overcame the hostilities of 1956. But there is no doubt that its emphasis has changed in Anthony Page's production. Originally the play was a great outburst of frustrated emotion made at a particular moment and shatteringly relevant to its generation. That moment has now passed, and instead of being delivered out to the audience, the play is firmly enclosed within the acting area. The most marked effect of this is that what one remembers as a sulphurously comic work has changed into a tight domestic melodrama.

Perhaps this is what Osborne intended when he wrote the piece. It certainly hangs together far more logically. What one now sees in Jimmy Porter is a man with surplus energy threshing about in apathetic company. His speeches hardly come across as tirades; he delivers them simply to irritate the others into life and feeling: and they get their natural release in the physical knockabout and the final tormented scene with Alison which reviewers originally found irrelevant and whimsical.(9)

In November 1972 the play was revived by The Young Vic in a production by Bernard Gass, and this production was not well received. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that most of the adverse criticism was focused upon the manner of direction rather than any weakness in the text. Indeed, in his review in The Times of 12 December 1972, Charles Lewson praised the play and its performers, especially Nicky Henson's interpretation of Jimmy Porter, heaping most of his displeasure upon the director, whose slow, almost static, staging robbed the play of the youthful drive and vigour so vital to the play's quality as a statement of youth's vibrant disillusionment.

Thus, at least a number of critics have considered the play worthy of revival and this adds some weight to the view that Look Back in Anger is not simply a slice of the life of a

disenchanted, educated rebel, ranting on about anything that takes his fancy in the violent years of the mid-1950 s.

Michael Billington suggests that if the focus of the play is slightly shifted, then a rather different story emerges:

The play very plausibly reflects the problems of an actor buried in the rut of a Midlands weekly rep in the 1950's knowing that he has a talent and energy that have so far gone unrecognised. (10).

This view can be substantiated from the very beginning of the play. The rut of weekly repertory was a rut deepened by poverty and enforced routine. For six days of the week, the companies were engaged in a frenetic regime of rehearsal and performance with only one day of respite, Sunday, when the lack of cash resultant from the normally poor wages denied the opportunity for the others fully to reap the benefits of a day off. So they lounged around in the digs and read the papers:

Jimmy: Why do I do this every Sunday? Even the book reviews seem to be the same as last week's: different books - same reviews. Have you finished that one yet? (p.10)...

Such a scene could easily have been a regular feature of Osborne's own weekly repertory career.

If one accepts the premise that Jimmy Porter is predominantly an actor, thinly disguised as a dropped-out academic, then much of his subsequent action makes more sense.



Early in the play, he displays his great talent for dramatic - perhaps over-dramatic - story telling:

Jimmy: (quickly) Did you read about the woman who went to the mass meeting of a certain American evangelist at Earl's Court. She went forward to declare herself for love or whatever it is, and, in the rush of converts to get to the front, she broke four ribs, and got kicked in the head. She was yelling her head off in agony, but with 50,000 people putting all they'd got into 'Onward Christian Soldiers', nobody even knew she was there. (He looks up sharply for a response, but there isn't any). (p.14)

This is a good story, embellished by a practiced story teller who, just like the tired provincial performer, is able to keep his eye on the audience in order to check the mood and to amend his performance accordingly. In this case, the audience - Cliff and Alison, his wife - ignores him, and so, a few lines later, he puts on a little more pressure:

Jimmy: You two will drive me round the bend soon. I know it, as sure as I'm sitting here. I mean, you're going to drive me mad. Oh, heaven, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm - that's all. I want to hear a warm thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! I'm alive! I've an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings and that we're actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say. Let's pretend we're human. (p.15)

This is genuine Jimmy Porter: performer. He builds his set-piece speeches to suit the grand gesture and then he slips back into a more composed mood, cajoling his audience of two into joining him in his own little world of make-believe: his own private theatre



of life.

Throughout the play, Jimmy emerges as a character for whom life contains a large element of the charade, the performance. Some examples are designed to inflict discomfort upon his audience, some are psychological barriers to protect him from reality: a row of metaphorical footlights to shield him from the real world.

In the first act, Jimmy performs mostly for the benefit of his wife and for Cliff Lewis, a friend from the adjoining bed-sitting room. However, the arrangement is flexible and both Alison and Cliff can be drawn into the act to suit the moment.<sup>11</sup>

The obvious tension which exists between Jimmy and Alison becomes a focus for Jimmy:

Jimmy: All this time time, I have been married to this woman, this monument to non-attachement, and suddenly I discover that there is actually a word that sums her up. Not just an adjective in the English language to describe her with - it's her name! Pusillanimous! It sounds like some fleshy roman matron, doesn't it! The Lady Pusillanimous seen here with her husband Sextus, on their way to the games. (Cliff looks troubled, and glances uneasily at Alison.) Poor Old Sextus! If he were put into a Hollywood film, he's so impressive, they'd make some poor British actor play the part. He doesn't know it, but those beefcake Christians will make off with his wife in the wonder of stereophonic sound before the picture's over. (Alison leans against the board and closes her eyes). The Lady Pusillanimous has been promised a brighter easier world than old Sextus can ever offer her. Hi Pusey! What say we get the hell down to the arena and maybe feed ourselves to a couple of lions, huh?

Alison: God help me, if he doesn't stop, I'll go out of my mind in a minute.

Jimmy: Why don't you? That would be something anyway. But I haven't told you what it means yet, have I? (Picks up the dictionary) I don't have to tell her, she knows. In fact, if my pronunciation is at fault, she'll probably wait for some suitably public moment to correct it. Here it is. I quote: Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timid of mind. From the Latin pusillus, very little, and animus, the mind. (Slams the book shut). That's my wife! That's her isn't it? Behold the Lady Pussilanimous. (Shouting hoarsely). Hi Pusey! When's your next picture? (p.21/22)

In this passage, Jimmy hits upon a metaphor and extends it. It is in the tradition of the music hall 'my wife' routine, but it is performed by Jimmy to an audience of one, Cliff, with his wife on stage with him as his stooge. The entire scene is executed in an actorly fashion: grand gesture - '(He slams the book shut,') switches of accent from scholarly extract from the dictionary to the hyper-Hollywood 'Hi Pusey, when's your next picture?' The metaphor is bitter and it is played for effect, the effect being the breakdown of Alison's shield. But the passage also contains bitterness of self-mocking nature. Jimmy casts himself as Sextus, who is so unimpressive he would be played by 'some poor British actor': Jimmy.

So, in addition to advancing the play's plot, the decaying relationship of Jimmy and Alison, the passage also underlines the theatrical nature of the major protagonist; Jimmy constantly performs for effect. But if he hides behind a performance to protect himself, he also creates, with Alison, a secret world to

which they can both escape from the pressures of reality:

Jimmy: You're very beautiful. A beautiful great-eyed squirrel. Hoarding, nut-munching squirrel (she mimes this delightedly) with highly polished, gleaming fur and an ostrich feather of a tail.  
Alison: Wheeeeeeee!  
Jimmy: How I envy you.  
Alison: Well you're a jolly super bear too. A really sooooooper marvellous bear.  
Jimmy: Bears and squirrels are marvellous. (p.34)

This secret world sustains their marriage. It is a constant presence in the play and it supplies the couple's only hope of salvation. At the end of the play, after their relationship has been placed under a variety of pressures, they escape into their fantasy world, leaving a suggestion of hope for the future. This implies that Jimmy cannot survive in the real world. As a performer, he needs to hide behind a fourth wall to protect him from the ugly face of reality:

Jimmy: There are cruel steel traps lying about everywhere, just waiting for rather mad, slightly satanic, and very timid little animals. (p.96)

Jimmy, like Archie Rice and George Dillon, seems to be in his most relaxed state when he is performing.

Again, like Archie and George, Jimmy discloses Osborne's love of the music hall - he has a predilection for lapsing into the home-made musical routine:

Jimmy: Thought of the title for a new song today. It's

Mildred. 'Cos you'll find my position is closed.'  
(Turning to Alison suddenly.) Good?

Alison: Oh, very good.

Jimmy: Thought you'd like it. If I can slip in a religious angle, it should be a big hit (to Helena) Don't you think so? I was thinking you might help me there. (She doesn't reply) It might help you if I recite the lyrics. Let's see now, it's something like this:

I'm so tired of necking  
of pecking, home wrecking,  
of empty bed blues -  
just pass me the booze,  
I'm tired of being hetero  
rather ride on the metero  
Just pass me the booze  
This perpetual whoring  
get's quite dull and boring  
So avoid that old python coil  
and pass me the celibate oil  
You can quit etc...

(pp.49/50)

Like the genuine actors who follow him, Jimmy has an urge to perform which is a significant element of his personality. His act develops as the play progresses. Later, when Helena has taken the position in the household temporarily vacated by Alison, Jimmy's role assumes a rather more sophisticated status, with both Helena and Cliff acting as his feeds, the entire performance consisting of song and dance, patter and stand-up slapstick.

As Irving Wardle has stated, 'legends have a habit of outgrowing their sources'. Look Back in Anger and Jimmy Porter have been legends for almost thirty years and if Jimmy is to be seen as something more than simply a revolutionary freak of the 1950's then one must search for something more than the rantings of an educated malcontent. The preceding paragraphs have

attempted to show that the power of Jimmy and of the play derives from the complexity of the man, which arises from his actor-type characteristics. It is clear that the hard years of the author's repertory career have rubbed off on to Jimmy Porter and in him Osborne has created a virtuoso role which, without doubt, could have been played 'beautifully' by Osborne, 'to perfection'.

## VII

From Jimmy Porter, the actor in disguise, Osborne moved on to Archie Rice and George Dillon, in his two plays concerning theatrical failure. However, when, in 1959, he produced his own first failure, The World of Paul Slickey, we find the central character is, once more, an actor in disguise. The central character, Jack Oakham, does not follow totally in the tradition of his predecessors, Jimmy, Archie and George, insofar as he does not dominate the stage, but he is very much an actor-type. He leads a double life. Like the true actor, he earns his living by being another person; in this case that other person is Paul Slickey, the Fleet Street hack. Moreover, his duality of character is not universally known and this adds a touch of the mystery which is part and parcel of the actor's life: the mystery which lies beyond the pass-door:

Jo: You mean to say that your wife's family don't know that you're Paul Slickey?

Jack: You know what her father and the Great Man feel about each other. She'd cut my allowance if it came out.  
(p.13)

Unfortunately, Jack, like all the other characters in the play, is not portrayed in any depth and this actorly aspect of his role is not developed to any significant degree. Nevertheless, the simple fact that Jack Oakham is forced to live a lie links him firmly with the true actors who precede him.

George Holyoake, the young teacher at the centre of A Subject of Scandal and Concern, is also required to perform as part of his daily routine. His offence, for which he is tried and imprisoned, is committed during a lecture on socialism:

Maitland: ...What, Sir, I would like to ask, of our duty to God?

Holyoake: (Uncertainly) Yes?

Maitland: Shall we not have churches and chapels in the community?

Holyoake: I do not wish to...

Maitland: That, Sir, is my question.

Holyoake: I do not wish to mix religion...

(Voice from floor - 'can't hear')

Holyoake: (Flustered) To mix religion with an economic and a secular subject, but I will try to answer the question frankly.

(Voice from floor - 'Hear, Hear')

Holyoake: Our National Debt is a millstone around the poor man's neck, and our church and general religious institutions cost us about twenty million pounds annually. Worship is expensive, and so I appeal to your heads and your pockets: are we not too poor to have God? If poor men cost the state as much, they would be put, like officers, on half pay. And while our present distress remains, it is wisest to do the same thing with the deity.

(scattered applause)

Maitland: But, Sir...

Chairman: What is it?

Maitland: My question has not been answered.

Chairman: Come, Mr. Maitland, Mr. Holyoake.

Maitland: What of morality, Mr. Holyoake?

Holyoake: I regard morality, but as for God, Mr. Maitland, I cannot bring myself to believe in such a thing.  
(p.16)

Holyoake's words constitute his offence, but what is important, in the context of this discussion, is the circumstance in which the words are spoken. Holyoake is in the role of public figure, communicator, performer. And to fulfil this role, he has to assume a facade. He has to play a role to cover up his real personality:

Mrs. Holyoake: Oh, you are no speaker and it's idle to pretend otherwise, but you will try your best.  
(p.15)

Holyoake's real self is far from the persona of the public orator:

Narrator: Mrs. Holyoake was right in saying that her husband was not an impressive speaker. He was easily flustered and if, as on some occasions, he was interrupted from the floor, he would normally drop his notes or, as on one agonizing evening, dry up completely.  
(p.15)

The use of the expression 'dry up' provides a distinct clue to the actorly nature of Holyoake's performance, and the narrator is here revealing what a real and conscious effort it is for Holyoake to speak in public. Moreover, there are occasions when his persona, the public orator, begins to take over his real self. During the early part of his trial, Holyoake, who insists

on conducting his own defence (presaging Bill Maitland's self-defence in Inadmissible Evidence), has great difficulty speaking to the court. His case is significantly weakened by his poor delivery, and then:

Holyoake: ...blasphemy is an impossibility. What does it mean but an annoyance to God? To believe in this is to believe in the magical power of words and there is no magic in the words, neither yours nor mine.

(Holyoake is beginning to find his way and collect himself. On the following speech he even attempts some lightness)

This blasphemy then is an antiquated accusation... (p.33)

Osborne's interjectory note invites a comparison with Jimmy Porter:

Jimmy: She's one of those apocalyptic share pushers who are spreading all these rumours about a transfer of power.

(His imagination is racing, and the words pour out)

Reason and progress, the old firm, is selling out. (p.55)

or with Archie Rice:

Archie: He was telling me if you drop your hat outside there now, you have to kick it down to the promenade before you can pick it up.

(Pauses quickly, then goes on expertly)

I saw a couple on the bus yesterday... (p.35)

Jimmy Porter is an instinctive performer who recognizes his opportunity. He has a sense of occasion and his rhetoric gushes



forth, spurred on by his intellect and the challenge he confronts. Archie is a time-served craftsman who assesses the situation and, in the fashion of the professional comic, responds accordingly. Holyoake is somewhere in between. Like Jimmy, his verbal delivery is not that of a highly polished performer but, as a teacher, he is in possession of some experience of public oratory. Like both of his predecessors, he responds to the occasion and his performance in court improves as his confidence grows and he begins to assess the mood of the audience.

#### VIII

Osborne's next actor-type is also in the same tradition as Jimmy Porter and Archie Rice. The review of Luther in The Times read:

In dealing with the part played by Luther in the Reformation, Mr. Osborne has partly to chronicle the history and partly to interpret the character of a malcontent whom events have raised to an altogether more heroic level. This rebel is not simply an entertainer angry with a world that refuses to be entertained by him, but an individualist of lowly birth, bad health and intellectual distinction who draws from continual fierce diggings into the depth of self the strength to become the wedge to split Christendom. (12).

These words suggest that Martin Luther is something of an extension of both Jimmy and Archie; 'this rebel is not simply an entertainer angry with a world that refuses to be entertained' are words which summarise the angry mood displayed by Jimmy and the performer/audience hatred which Archie manifests, as does George Dillon to a lesser degree.

Like his predecessors, Martin Luther is a superb acting role. According to Martin Banham:

Once again, Osborne has created a central role that dominates the play to the virtual exclusion of all others, and Albert Finney, in the original production of the play, created this role and brought great distinction to it. It remains one of the most demanding of parts on the modern stage, requiring an actor who can interpret above the information and business provided by Osborne, and promising disaster for the actor who cannot. (13)

The role of Martin so dominates the play that, much more than both Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer, Luther is in essence a one-man show and that man is very much an Osbornian actor-type. He is a performer working in a world that has about it a great deal of implied theatricality.

At the beginning of the play, Martin is seen undergoing the role change of novice to monk in a manner which parallels the assumption of a character as practised by the actor:

Prior: Now you must choose one of two ways: either to leave us now or give up this world, and consecrate and devote yourself entirely to God and our Order. But I must add this: once you have committed yourself, you are not free, for whatever reason, to throw off the yoke of obedience, for you will have accepted it freely, while you were still able to discard it.  
(The habit and hood of the Order are brought in and blessed by the Prior).  
He whom it was your will to dress in the garb of the Order, oh Lord, invest Him also with eternal life.  
(He undresses Martin)  
The Lord divest you of the former man and of all his works. The Lord invest you with the new man.  
(The choir sings as Martin is robed in the habit and hood...). (p.13)

Martin's role change is, in itself, a performance. Martin is the centre of attention in a ritual observed by the assembled convent of the Order.

This view of Martin as a performer is reinforced in the play's second scene. During this scene, albeit offstage, he conducts his first Mass, a ceremony which is referred to in heavily theatrical language, and the prospect of playing the central role fills Martin with trepidation. He is clearly suffering from first-night nerves.

It's the single words that trouble me. (p.27)

And when the subject of his father's presence in the congregation is discussed, Martin asks in a very actor-like manner, 'Where's he sitting?' (p.29): very reminiscent of the actor enquiring as to the whereabouts of an influential or important member of the audience.

Following the Mass, it is revealed that Martin's performance has been somewhat short of perfection. Bearing in mind that 'there are a great many things to memorize' (p.33), it becomes apparent that he has forgotten his lines:

Hans: Well, Brother Martin, you had a right time up there by that altar for a bit, didn't you? I wouldn't have been in your shoes, I'll tell you. All those people listening to you, every word you're saying, watching every little tiny movement, watching for one lousy mistake. I couldn't keep my eyes off it. We all thought you

were going to flunk it for one minute there, didn't we, Lucas?

Lucas: Well, we had a couple of anxious moments.

Hans: Anxious moments! I'll say there were. I thought to myself 'he's going to flunk it, he can't get through it, he's going to flunk it!' What was that bit, you know, the worst bit where you stopped and Brother...

Martin: Weinand.

Hans: Weinand, yes, and he very kindly helped you up. He was actually holding you up at one point, wasn't he.

Martin: Yes.

Brother: It happens often enough when a young priest celebrates Mass for the first time.

Hans: Looked as though he didn't know if it was Christmas or Wednesday. We thought the whole thing had come to a standstill for a bit, didn't we? Everyone was waiting and nothing happening. What was that bit, Martin, what was it?

Martin: I don't remember.

Hans: Yes, you know, the bit you really flunked.

Martin: (rattling it off). Receive, oh Holy Father, Almighty and eternal God, this spotless host, which I, thine unworthy servant, offer unto thee for my own innumerable sins of commission and omission, and for all here present and all faithful Christians, living and dead, so that it may avail for their salvation and everlasting life.

When I entered the monastery I wanted to speak to God directly, you see, without any embarrassment. I wanted to speak to him myself, but when it came to it, I dried up as I always have. (pp.37/38)

The actor's nightmare; Martin has forgotten his words at the climax of his performance. The fact that he knows the words perfectly well is of little consequence; we are informed that, when under stress, he repeatedly suffers the same loss of memory, and, in conveying that information, Osborne uses a particularly theatrical expression, 'I dried up as I always have.'

Martin's role as performer is emphasized by the words of his father. When he remarks 'All those people listening to you,

every word you're saying, watching every little tiny movement, watching for one little lousy mistake' he is placing Martin firmly in the centre of the performance.

Hans' obvious guacheness at rubbing salt into the wounds of his son's self respect is soon regretted, and the tension between them relaxes. Hans then goes on to remark how untypical of Martin the mistakes were:

Hans: You've been trained to remember ever since you were a tiny boy. Men like you don't just forget their words!

Martin: I don't understand what happened. I lifted up my head at the host, and, as I was speaking the words, I heard them as if it were the first time and suddenly (pause) they struck at my life. (p.40)

Hans is, of course, wrong. Priests, actors and the whole range of public performers do forget their words more often than many people realise, but Martin, in the above speech, echoes an actor's bewilderment when he claims that he heard the words 'as if it were the first time'. An actor embarking upon a performance cannot see all the milestones and sign posts which are to guide him on his way, but each one, each staged event, will provide the impetus to spur him on through the next section. Martin's spiritual experience during the Mass bears a striking resemblance to that of the actor navigating his way through a major and demanding performance. 'Father, I'm never sure of the words till I hear them out loud' (p.60) says Martin to Staupitz, the Vicar General, echoing the spontaneity of the actor's

performance as he recreates the onstage events, rather than simply voices the words as isolated items of memory.

However, Martin's performances are not all so faulted. Indeed, there is evidence that he is something of a polished performer; he relates a story to Staupitz about Tetzels, the indulgence vendor's activities with a fluency and style suggestive of Archie Rice's aptitude for narrative. Michael Billington goes further, suggesting a link between Martin and Max Miller,<sup>14</sup> and the sermons confirm Martin's skill as a communicator, an orator par excellence clearly in the tradition of Jimmy Porter and Archie Rice.

## IX

The central figures of the Plays for England are not so dominant as Martin Luther and his predecessors, but they are, nevertheless, actor-types in the sense that performance provides a firm base for their characters. In The Blood of The Bambergers, Russell, the Australian press photographer, is required to assume the role of the dead Prince Wilhelm and the entire second act of the play is devoted to his performance. However, his performance is of considerably lighter weight than Martin's and the main concern of Osborne in writing the piece seems to be to examine the theatrical nature of state spectacle rather than to examine the complexity of a character who performs as part of his daily life. Indeed, Russell is the reluctant actor and his performance is thrust upon him.

Tim and Jenny, in Under Plain Cover, are, on the other hand, far from being reluctant in their roleplaying. In the previous chapter, a comparison was drawn between Tim and Jenny's private acting games and the 'bears and squirrels' charade of Jimmy and Alison in Look Back in Anger, but a significant point of contrast is the depth to which Tim and Jenny are prepared to go to bring authenticity to their domestic theatre. Their charades are altogether more complete; they dress up and act out roles in a manner which, for its success, depends on their enthusiasm and talent. At the beginning of the play, they perform the roles of doctor and housemaid:

Tim: Now, don't stand around here talking all day.  
Serve tea.  
Jenny: Yes, Sir.  
Tim: My Lord.  
Jenny: Yes, my Lord. Oh are you a Lord?  
Tim: Yes, I think so. Let's try it and see.  
Jenny: All right. I don't think its so good, though.  
Tim: Why?  
Jenny: I don't know. I don't think you look quite right in that.  
Tim: Yes, maybe you're right. OK, leave it as it was. (Reverting back to charcter.) Go on, then. You don't want your cards, do you?  
Jenny: No, Sir.  
Tim: You don't want to be dismissed without a reference, do you?  
Jenny: Oh, no, Sir.  
Tim: Think how upset your family would be if you lost your job. What would your father do to you?  
Jenny: Take off his strap to me, Sir.  
Tim: Yes, there are plenty of girls just waiting, longing to step into your shoes.  
Jenny: Yes, Sir. Oh, is this the nineteen thirties?  
Tim: Yes.  
Jenny: When did you think of that?  
Tim: When do you think? Just now.  
Jenny: Oh, what a good idea! Oh, please Sir. I need the job badly. Dad's still on the dole, and both me brothers are down bad.  
Tim: Well, then you'd better watch your behaviour, hadn't you?



Jenny: Yes, Sir. I will. I'll do anything you say, Sir - anything. (pp.17/18)

This scene, and several others in a similar vein, transcends the level of the mere party game. Complete with costume and properties, they assume the status of minor improvised plays. Thus, Tim and Jenny fall neatly into the category of the Osbornian actor-types: perhaps more neatly because of their obvious quasi-theatricality, than any of Osborne's prior creations, with the clear exceptions of Archie Rice and George Dillon.

The role changes of Tim and Jenny are all carried out with considerable attention to detail. As well as doctor and housemaid, they appear in a variety of guises: Tim as a boxer and a leatherclad motorcyclist and Jenny as a Girl Guide and an obviously pregnant bride. The multi-faceted nature of their roles is not only significant in that the acting out of a series of charades provides a necessary pretence for the marriage, but the nature of the roles is essentially sexual, adding a hint of spice to the proceedings. Osborne deliberately refrains from making explicit precisely what the physical outcome of the doctor/maid playlet is to be, but some sort of sadomasochistic activity is implied. This hint of spice suggests that something slightly out of the ordinary goes on when the actors are out of sight and this contributes to the mystery of the Osbornian actor type which accords with the views of Michael Anderson quoted in the first chapter of this thesis.

Inadmissible Evidence's Bill Maitland is, like his predecessors, a performer; it was observed in Chapter Two how he stands in the direct line of succession to the previous Osborne central figures. Like Jimmy Porter and Archie Rice, Bill displays an unappealing nature, yet he emerges as a character with whom the audience sympathizes. Osborne achieves this in a similar manner to that by which he achieves the same effect in both Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer: he causes his leading character to dominate both the action and the dialogue. Bill has all the best lines (indeed, he has nearly all the lines) and, importantly, he entertains.

In creating the part of a lawyer, Osborne has not strayed too far from familiar territory. It has already been noted, in the discussion concerning A Subject of Scandal and Concern, that the courts were, to the younger Osborne, a branch of popular theatre, and the lawyers, like lecturers, preachers and, of course, entertainers are essentially communicators. Their business is language and thus they fit easily into the actor-type mould.

Bill Maitland tells a good story. Like Jimmy and Archie, he is at home when dealing with words. He must be, as a lawyer who has experienced some success:

I have worked in the services of the law - if you can call being a solicitor working in the service of the law - for nearly twenty five years. In fact, I started work in this very office, this Court, when I was fifteen. Perhaps earlier. That is my old boss's chair. You see, I took his position over from him. My managing clerk, old Hudson, he was working for the old man even then. Not that he was much older than me. He just always seemed older. Anyway, he works for me now. I don't even know why I took up the law. I don't think there was any reason at all much. I can't think of any now and I couldn't think of any then. Perhaps I did think I might land up on the bench even. Or with Learned Counsel...I have always been tolerably bright. (pp.12/13)

Maitland must have possessed that facility with language which would enable him to hold the attention of a courtroom audience. In Inadmissible Evidence, he is required to hold his audience, both the characters on stage with him, and those front-of-house, through some exceedingly long and tortuous solo passages.

The most demanding of these, in terms of length and challenge to the performer, is Maitland's scene with his daughter, Jane. For some 1500 words, he confronts his totally silent daughter, voicing, through Osborne's pen, the insecurity of middle age in the youthful, swinging sixties. His rhetoric, unlike that of Jimmy Porter, is highly personal. Of the first performance, Bernard Levin wrote:

Mr. Osborne has written a modern Peer Gynt who was also told that 'Backwards or forwards, it's just as far' and who peeled an onion to find nothing inside. (15)

The scene with Jane displays the closing stages of this peeling process. The layers are layers of affection and identity, and, as he peels off the layer represented by his family, it becomes

clear that he has little left worth keeping.

You'll hitch hike and make your young noises from one end of Europe to the other without a thought of having the correct currency or the necessary language. And you're right. And you dance with each other, in such a way I would never have been able to master. (He gazes longingly across) But, and this is the but, I still don't think what you're doing will ever, even, even, approach the fibbing, mumping, pinched little worm of energy eating away in this me, of mine, I mean. That is: which is that of being slowly munched and then diminished, altogether. That worm, thank heaven, is not in your little cherry rose. You are unselfconscious, which I am not. You are without guilt, which I am not. Quite rightly. You are stuffed full of paltry relief for emergent countries, and marches and boycotts and rallies, you, you kink your innocent way along tirelessly to all that poetry and endless jazz and folk worship, and looking gay and touching and stylish all at the same time. But there isn't much loving in any of your kindnesses, Jane, not much kindness, not even cruelty, really, in any of you, not much craving for the harm of others, perhaps just a very easy, controlled, sharp, I mean 'sharp' pleasure in discomfiture. You're flip and offhand and if you are the unfeeling things you appear to be, no one can really accuse you of being cruel in the proper sense. If you should ever, and I hope you shan't my dear, I truly do, for I've leapt at the very idea of you, before you were ever born, let alone the sight and smell of you; if you should one day start to shrink slowly into an unremarkable, gummy little hole, into a world outside the care or consciousness of anyone, you'll have no rattlings of shame or death, there'll be no little sweating, eruptions of blood, no fevers or clots or flesh splitting anywhere or haemorrhage. You'll have done everything well and sensibly and stylishly. You'll know it wasn't worth any candle that ever burned. You will have to be blown out, snuffed, decently, and not be watched spluttering and spilling and hardening. (He sits on sofa). (pp.84/85)

Theatrically, this works as a very moving scene, and the sympathy of the audience, in spite of the fact that Bill is scornful in the extreme of his daughter's values and those of the generation she represents, remains with him. This results from the manner of delivery rather than the message itself. 'Bill's torrent of words show him at his most human and nostalgic moment' and,

regardless of what he says, in the role of the man alone, the solo performer, he is at the centre of the audience's sympathy.

Like Archie Rice, Bill's performances vary. The long scene with Jane, and the even longer solo telephone conversations, recall Archie's crumbling facade as he relates the story of the nun, but Bill is also, like Archie, Jimmy and, to an extent, Martin Luther, the witty raconteur, as one would expect from a man whose business is performance:

Bill: They won't need us much longer. They'll need no more lawyers. Have you seen the papers this morning? (He hands a newspaper to Hudson.) Some mathematical clerk will feed all our petitions and depositions into some clattering brute of a computer and the answer will come out guilty or not guilty in as much time as it takes to say it. They'll be no more law's delay, just the insolence of somebody's office. They'll need no more lawyers. I don't understand who will be needed.

Hudson: I shouldn't think it'll quite come to that.

Bill: How do you know what we'll come to? Or when? Sometimes I wish I were older so I had less chance of finding out. (Bangs newspaper.) Look at this dozy bastard: Britain's position in the world. Screw that. What about my position? Votewheeling creep, just waiting to get us into his bag and turn us out into a lot of technological dogs turning his wheelspit of endless bloody consumption and production. Why doesn't he stick his scientific rod into the Red Sea or where he likes and take everyone he likes with him - including Jones. The sooner the sea closes up behind them the better. With Jones entering the promised land in his mini.

Hudson: Oh, leave the poor boy along. What's he done to you? anyway, he's got a motor bike.

Bill: Even better. I can't think of a better way to emerge - in an emergent country, why don't they all go and emerge? Emerge. (pp.23/24)

This seems to be part of the regular morning routine in the firm: Bill enjoying a little banter with his managing clerk prior to embarking upon the serious business of the day. He assumes the dominant role in the dialogue with Hudson, in a manner reminiscent of Cliff and Alison in Look Back in Anger, filling in as both feed and on-stage audience.

Within Inadmissible Evidence, Bill is seen in a variety of roles. He is the failing father figure as witnessed in the scene with Jane, the sometimes competent leader of the firm, but the images of Bill which dominate are those of tired womaniser, failed husband, failing lover and increasingly ineffective solicitor. These roles are not clearly separated. Indeed, they become increasingly blurred as Bill's decline gathers momentum and, just as Archie becomes disorientated when he looks up on-stage, unsure of his whereabouts, so Bill begins to confuse his varying roles.

This state of confusion is particularly apparent when Bill is observed in interview with his clients, the first three of whom are women petitioning for divorce: particularly apposite clients for Maitland, the failed husband. Osborne augments Bill's confusion by stipulating that all three clients, Mrs. Garnsey, Mrs. Tonks and Mrs. Anderson, should be played by the same actress. 'Again, it is the same woman as Mrs. Garnsey and Mrs. Tonks' (p.66) - a device by which the confused state of Bill's mind can be the more readily perceived by the audience. The first client, Mrs. Garnsey, establishes a mood which implies that her

complaint is much the same as that which would be raised by Bill's own wife. He outlines the core of the petition:

Bill:           The adultery seems quite clearly established. There are these three women, apart from all the others. There - there seems to be more than enough there. (p.43)

Bill's slight hesitation - 'there - there' - suggests that the Garnsey petition pierces his professional facade and, towards the end of the interview, Mrs. Garnsey breaks down during a speech which is a clear summary of Bill's marriage:

Mrs. G:   He comes home to me, and I know that nothing really works for him. Not at the office, nor his friends, not even his girls. I wish they would. God knows he tries hard enough. I wish I could help him. But I can't, and everyone, everyone, whenever we go together, whether it's a night out, or an evening at our club, or an outing with the children, everyone's I know, everyone's drawing away from him. And the more people have been good and kind and thoughtful to me, the worse it's been for him. I know. And now, Now: I'm doing the same thing. And now it's me. I can't bear to see him rejected and laughed at and scorned behind his back and ignored - (all this last is scarcely audible.) and now it's me. I've got to leave him. (Nothing more meaningful comes from her. Bill gets up to confront her but is paralysed.) (pp.44/45)

When confused by a vision of the truth, Bill is paralysed; he is no longer able to sustain his role.

The interview with the second client, Mrs. Tonks, is something of a repetition of that with Mrs. Garnsey, except that Bill assumes the role of the husband in the case, thereby



dramatizing the petition and increasing the degree of Bill's own role change from legal counsellor to failing husband:

Mrs Tonks: That. the respondent refused to cease from having intercourse during the time of the petitioner's menstrual periods at 42 MacWilliam Street and Number 11 Wicker Street, notwithstanding the petitioner's entreaties...

Bill: There were difficulties between us. Such that my wife failed to reach satisfaction.

Mrs Tonks: That. On frequent occasions at the said addresses whilst he was having intercourse with the petitioner he did -

Bill: My wife visited the Marriage Guidance Council on at least three occasions, who told her they believed that the difficulty was due to my wife's reluctance -

Mrs Tanks: Notwithstanding the fact that he knew the petitioner found this conduct revolting and upsetting.

Bill: We've none of us been reluctant much, have we? Well, there were girls like Maureen, and even with you there were difficulties but not revolting or upsetting. At least, not much. I don't think so. You weren't reluctant, you should be happy. You didn't cling on to it like it was the crown jewels. You were generous, loving, bright, you should have been able to cope. I should have been able to cope.

Mrs Tonks: He told the petitioner he liked to hear the noise made by -

Bill: To have another child. Another child. In spite of the advice given to her by the Council she refused to use this.

Mrs Tonks: That. It was his desire to have sexual intercourse with a woman in this street to whom he referred -

Bill: Because she said it was nasty. Nasty and messy.  
(p.64)

The sense of ambiguity increases. Bill shifts subconsciously from role to role. 'I should have been able to cope' is a plaintive cry which Bill utters as himself, having drifted away from the assumed persona of Mr Tonks and, prompted by the facts in the Tonks petition, expresses his own weaknesses. This scene moves the atmosphere of the play away from the realism of the

solicitor's office back towards the dream world of the play's opening scene: the shift continues in the interview with the third client, Mrs. Anderson. With this client, the role of legal counsellor is stripped from Bill; her marital problems are subsumed by his own and he seems totally to lose his grip on reality:

Mrs. A: Audrey Jane Anderson will prove as follows:  
Bill: What goes wrong. Nothing happens for you, I fail you, and you're frightened and full of dislike.  
Mrs. A: I was married at Kidderminster Registry Office. I was a spinster. My maiden name was Wall. My husband was then a clerk in the local post office. Our marriage -  
Bill: Our marriage. What a phrase.  
Mrs. A: Our marriage seemed normal for a time and reasonably happy. there were difficulties owing to the fact that we were living at my mother's house, 148 Chadacre Road, for two years.  
(Bill makes a massive effort to assemble the facts in his mind. It is very difficult.)  
Bill: Two years. You know, you mustn't expect people to behave well towards you, Audrey. You mustn't. I know you have and I know you will.  
Mrs. A: There was discord when I was pregnant with the little boy, Patrick John.  
Bill: Patrick John.  
Mrs. A: My parents persuaded me to return to him.  
Bill: You must always ask yourself. Is it dangerous or is it safe. And then make your choice. If you can, if you can.  
Mrs. A: Things became increasingly unhappy and difficult when my husband gave up his job and became a traveller for a firm of electrical fittings. He was able to be at home most of the time, but when he was away, never more than for the odd day or two, he would accuse me of going out with other men.  
Bill: Well. She thinks I've got mistresses all over London. They both do. And it's not even true. Worst luck. No, thank God.  
Mrs. A: He said I ought to go on the streets.  
Bill: You might have met me then. You might have been worse off.  
Mrs. A: I have never been with anyone apart from my husband.  
Bill: That's what's wrong with all of you, you dim deluded little loving things. You listen to

promiscuous lady journalists and bishops and your mother. And hang on to it.

Mrs. A: But he's always saying these things.

Bill: He listens. (pp.67/68)

This exchange establishes a contrapuntal rhythm, each participant in turn stripping a layer off 'the onion skin'. In the course of the complementary stories, Bill drifts away from reality altogether, moving into a fantasy world from the problems of his client, hiding behind a mask of reverie in order to escape from the problems of his own existence: an actor who, like Archie Rice, has become obscured by his role.

## XI

On the other hand, Alfred Redl, in A Patriot for Me, consciously attempts obscurity; he has to act the role of the heterosexual patriot in order to continue his army career with success. The play is, in many ways, totally different from any that precede it, even though it provides yet another virtuoso Osbornian role:

It's still a one-man play. Redl monopolizes just as much of the action as Jimmy Porter or Archie Rice or Luther or Bill Maitland, but he doesn't commandeer it in the way they do and he's not used as a mouthpiece for Osborne's opinion and attitudes. He doesn't even talk much about his feelings. Shyer, less extravert than the other heroes, he goes out of his way to adapt himself to the situation he's in and the people he's with. (17)

As an actor-type, Redl is less interested in the heightened performance than in the studied creation of a role. His public

facade is a carefully nurtured creation, that of the loyal, respected, ambitious army officer. His ability to act out such a role and, indeed the necessity for it, is revealed in the opening stages of the play:

I'm quite plausible and not half a bad actor for one...reason and another. (p.16)

Redl admits this before his true nature is fully revealed, even to himself, and his performance as 'not half a bad actor' is low key and totally devoid of the flamboyance of Jimmy or Archie.

The full revelation of Redl's true self, his true sexuality, is gradual, both to the audience and also to the character. His affair with Countess Delyanoff, arranged by the Russian intelligence service as a potential area for blackmail, is a charade which causes agony and which is clearly far from providing satisfaction:

Countess: ...Don't turn your head away.

(She grabs his head and kisses him. He submits for a moment, then thrusts her away.)

Redl: Please!

Countess: What is it? Me?

Redl: No - you're - you're easily the most beautiful, desirable woman I've ever...There couldn't be...

Countess: It's not easy to believe.

Redl: Sophia: it's me. It's like a disease. (pp.56/57)

Nevertheless, he continues to play the part, deluding even himself until he is confronted by the truth in a Viennese cafe:

Young Man: Excuse me, Sir.  
 Redl: Well?  
 Young Man: May I glance at your paper?  
 Redl: If you wish. (Irritated.) The waiter will  
 bring you one if you ask.  
 Young Man: I only want to see what's on at the opera.  
 Redl: Lohengrin.  
 Young Man: Oh, thank you - No, I don't think I like  
 Wagner much, do you?  
 Redl: No, now please go away.  
 (The young man grins at him, and leans across  
 to him, saying softly.)  
 Young Man: I know what you're looking for.  
 (Redl looks stricken. The young man walks  
 away. He is almost out of sight when Redl  
 runs after him.)  
 Redl: You!  
 (Redl grabs him with ferocious power by the  
 neck.) What do you mean? (p.67)

From this stage, the truth is fully realised by Redl, and his  
 acting has to start in earnest in order to survive in his chosen  
 profession. However, the truth about his sexuality is revealed to  
 the Russians and where they failed to trap him by use of the  
 countess, his own homosexual activities provide them with the  
 material for blackmail. He becomes a spy for the Russians and  
 has, in addition, to act the role of patriot in order to maintain  
 his position. But like Archie's, Redl's performance is imperfect.  
 He is found out and he is unable to face the humiliation and  
 disgrace which exposure would entail. He cannot accept the truth  
 and so, given the means to end his life, he does so: not in a  
 grand actorly manner but in the quiet of his own room in a way  
 that typifies his performance. Redl's acting is a private  
 performance, devoid of the Archie Rice showmanship and the Jimmy  
 Porter delight in grandiloquence, but a performance of strength  
 and sustained effort, nonetheless.

## XII

After Redl, Osborne reverted, in the creation of The Hotel in Amsterdam's Laurie, to a rather more flamboyant type of character, reminiscent of the earlier Osbornian performers.

To be sure, there is Osborne's ubiquitous grumbling character with an arm's length list of prejudices whose compulsive wit tends to take over the stage...But Laurie in this play, is not merely a variation on an old theme; he is tempered by the ensemble interest and differs from earlier examples of his type in two significant respects: he likes everyone onstage, so that his invective is closer to harmless cocktail party cleverness than to the sarcasm of Jimmy or Pamela; and, more importantly, despite his self pity and attention-getting devices, he is affectionate and can readily express admiration for others. (18)

Laurie extends Osborne's technique of gaining the audience's sympathy for the central character by simply placing that character at the centre of attention. He is a genuinely nice person. He is also witty, charming and successful and as such he marks a turning point in the development of the Osbornian actor-type.

Laurie's predecessors are predominantly vociferous failures. He is successful, wealthy and, importantly, very entertaining. His ability to tell a good story is as good as, if not better than, his predecessors':

Laurie: Did I tell you about the boy with the crocodile shoes?  
Annie: No, but it's too long. I've heard it.  
Dan: Tell them the one about the nun in the enclosed order.

Gus: Wish I could remember jokes.

Laurie: Young nun enters an enclosed order with a strict vow of silence. The silence can only be broken once every three years with two words. So: after three years the girl goes to the Mother Superior, who says: "Now my child, three years have passed since you entered the order. You have kept your vow of silence. It is now your privilege to say any two words you wish to me." So the young nun pauses painfully, opens her mouth and says "Uncomfortable beds". So the Mother Superior says "Right, my child, and now you may go back to your work." Three more years pass and she comes before the Mother Superior again. "You have observed the rule of this order for three more years. It is your privilege to say two words to me - if you wish." So the nun hesitates and then says: "Bad food." "Very well, go back to your work, my child." Another three years pass and the nun is brought in front of the Mother Superior again. "Well, my child, three more years have passed. Is there anything you wish to say to me?" The nun raises her eyes and, after an effort, she whispers: "I want to go home." "Well," says the Mother Superior "I'm glad to hear it, you've done nothing but bitch ever since you got here..." (pp.134/135)

Laurie's ability to tell a story comes as no surprise. He is, after all, a film writer, but the story of the nun is reminiscent of Archie's story in scene five of The Entertainer:

Archie: Well, there I was walking along the front to meet what I think we used to call a piece of crackling. Or perhaps it was a bit of stuff. No that was earlier. Anyway, I know I enjoyed it afterwards. But the point is I was walking along the front, all on my own, minding my own business, (pause) and two nuns came towards me - (pause) two nuns - (he trails off, looking very tired and old. He looks across at Jean and pushes the bottle at her).

Archie: Talk to me. (p.42)

Archie's story of the nuns is broken off. He fails to tell the tale and his oldness and tiredness betoken his overall failure.



In contrast, Laurie's nun story is complete and is successfully told. It reaches the standard expected of a man who is one of a group described as 'pretty flash and vigorous looking'. (p.87)

Laurie's acting ability is boldly demonstrated in his mock-Italian turn. This is an obvious and favourite party trick of Laurie's which is as much a part of the relaxation routine of the select coterie of show-business folk represented in the play:

Laurie: Sorry, actually, I do speak Italian quite beautifully, don't I, darling?

Margaret: The accent's good.

Laurie: Poor vocabulary. But they don't mind if you make it up. They love it. (All very fast but clear). Prego, prego, si, grazie. Signorina. E machina bella. Grande film con regessori K.L. con attrici Inglesi Tutte bellissima. Attrici Inglesi molto ravissante crumpeto di mond. Per che. Me Lauri scrittori Inglesi famioso conossori, grosso. Molto esperimento. Senze pommodori, si. Oggi declarimento atrice Inglesi crumpetto elegante, insatiabile, splendido lasagne verde antifascisti pesce Anna Magnani Visconti arrivederci con rubato grazie mille, grazie. There, wasn't that good! Allemange basta! Pasta per tute populo. Kosygin pappa mio. Si grappa, per favore. (pp.100/101)

This, too, has its roots in early Osborne, as suggested by George Dillon's Chinaman act on the telephone and Jimmy Porter's Hollywood movie-mogul accent in Look Back in Anger.

Like his predecessors, Laurie, as an actor-type, needs an audience. His companions for the weekend in Amsterdam need him to entertain them, but he needs to entertain people. Jimmy Porter needs his audience on stage with him to provide a focus for his performed rhetoric. Archie's audience is dwindling away,

reflecting his own failure, leaving 'only the music', and even Bill Maitland cannot bear to be isolated from an audience. He needs someone to listen, even if it is only a telephone with, perhaps, no-one at the other end. Laurie, ultimately, is afraid of loneliness:

Laurie: I wish I could live alone. Do you?

Annie: No, I never have.

Laurie: I have sometimes. It can be alright for weeks on end even, but then you have to crawl out of the well. Just a circle of light and your own effort...(p.119)

Shortly after this somewhat plaintive speech, the first act dims to a close and, according to Alan Carter, 'Laurie sits looking out across the stage, his eyes filled with terror at his future, as the lights around him slowly dim.' (19) The terror which Laurie feels derives from the prospect of losing his audience because, as an actor-type, he cannot exist without one.

### XIII

Michael Billington claims that there is great similarity between this aspect of Laurie and Wyatt Gillman in West of Suez:

In both The Hotel in Amsterdam and West of Suez the heroes are writers but they are both deliberate and self-acknowledged performers who demand an audience; indeed the most moving moment in West of Suez was in Ralph Richardson's look of utter dread and desperation as he was left alone on stage for the first time on that strange and frightening Caribbean island. (20)

There is similarity, but Wyatt Gillman is altogether less flamboyant than Laurie. Laurie's performances are extravagant and are executed for the enjoyment of others and his own self-gratification. On the other hand, Gillman is a rather more subtle performer whose acting is done as an exercise in self-amusement. In a sense, he is more selfish; he is at home when the subject of discussion is himself.

Wyatt: ...who can blame them if they're as selfish as me. I never bothered with my children. Some people would say I was selfish and maybe it's so but I've always been fascinated by myself long after everyone else was bored to death with me. (p.50)

Perhaps the difference between Laurie and Gillman is that Laurie's flamboyance stems from the fact that he is a writer of performance pieces; he writes for the cinema. Gillman is, on the other hand, a novelist, not unlike Broome in The Gift of Friendship:

One is certainly able to believe that Wyatt is a writer and one could hazard an accurate guess as to the type of book he would write. (21)

22

He delights in the use of words 'throwing them about at will', and this is particularly apparent in his interview with Mrs. James, the visiting journalist. In this section, his performance becomes rather more typical of the early Osborne. He is the mouthpiece used to voice a handful of the author's prejudices and he executes this in a manner very reminiscent of Jimmy Porter, ranging, as noted in the previous chapter, from religion to

literary criticism. Wyatt's opening responses in the interview reveal a degree of mock modesty. He is relishing the prospect of being the centre of attention:

Wyatt: Well, where shall we begin?  
Mrs. James: Wherever you like.  
Christopher: You're the one conducting the interview.  
Wyatt: I don't really know why you should want to talk to me at all. I've got no interesting views or opinions about anything. Never have done. I don't believe in much, never have done, never been inspired by anything. I'm simply over-talkative, vain, corpulent, and a bit of a played-out hulk, as I think most of the world knows and I'm surprised the news hasn't even reached this delightful little island of yours.  
Mrs. James: Isn't it a bit early to start being patronising?  
Wyatt: I am never patronising. I am in no position to be so. And never have been.  
Mrs. James: How do you feel at the moment? How do you feel at the moment?  
Wyatt: Just about the same as usual. Except hotter. Always weary, ineffably bored, always in some sort of vague pain and always with a bit of unsatisfying hatred burning away in the old inside like a heartburn or indigestion.  
Mrs. James: I can see we may not get very far.  
Wyatt: Does it matter?  
Mrs. James: Not to you. I've simply been sent to do a job. Well, let's take an easy one first: What do you think of your fellow writers?  
Wyatt: Fellow writers! What a dreadful expression!  
Mrs. James: I'm sorry, I couldn't think of anything else to describe the people who practise the same profession.  
Wyatt: I try not to think of my fellow writers. (pp.70/71)

Wyatt Gillman admits to being a 'played out hulk' but secretly believes that he is not, unlike Archie Rice who really is played-out but refuses to admit it. Both men require an audience to satisfy their desires for attention; Archie tries to procure one and fails whereas Gillman, the literary elder statesman, has

simply to sit back in the sun and the audience comes to him.

#### XIV

Wyatt Gillman is the latest of Osborne's dominant, central, actor-type characters. Although he is not on stage for anything like the entire play, when the central character was off-stage, interest flagged.<sup>23</sup> This is not the case with Osborne's subsequent original stage work. In A Sense of Detachment no single character dominates and Lady Regine Frimley in The End of the Old Cigar is dominant only in the first act of the play. During this act, she displays many of the characteristics already seen in earlier Osborne actor-types. The dialogue is heavily weighted in her favour, most of the other characters simply providing feed lines from which traditional Osbornian rhetoric can ensue, reminiscent of Jimmy Porter, Bill Maitland and even Laurie, although Regine's monologues lack the charm and good humour present in The Hotel in Amsterdam:

Regine: ...I never liked young people when I was 'young people' myself. But then he likes cliches, which is what young people are, of course.

Stella: You couldn't read newspapers without them.

Regine: Nobody would understand them then would they? But I'm afraid Stan is a bit of a cliché himself, wide open to popular fashion. I suppose people who are cliches must be certain to learn others, even in their speech. He doesn't talk a lot but when he does I often don't understand him at all. He even uses ones he doesn't understand.

Stella: Like?

Regine: Oh, he understands the usual ones: like - funky; cool it - I think that's out; - bad trips; being in some sort of 'scene' - sounds like a part in a play to me; having hang-ups - he has lots of those I believe; chicks, birds, calling everyone 'baby';

saying 'fucking' because he doesn't know any other adjectives - or hardly; chart-buster; he's picked up some he doesn't grasp at all from some of the girls with social consciences in particular. Oh, you know the sort of thing; street action groups; committee jargon; lobbying the council; even 'growing resentment' - you might read that in The Times even; play communities, play centres, play groups, centres for; centres of all kinds from 'pig bashing' to 'aggro' and 'agit-prop'; playgrounds, parks, talking about his groups as if they were the Amadeus Quartet...

Stella: Seems to me you don't like many things. Including Stan.

Regine: Oh, but I do. I don't believe in hiding one's malice. (pp.17/8)

Hiding one's malice is a trait unseen in any of Regine's predecessors, from Jimmy, who positively thrives on malice, to even the good natured Laurie, who displays a surprising degree of malice when his sister-in-law breaches the secrecy of the weekend in Amsterdam.

Like many of Osborne's predecessors, Regine is performing a role. As the high society brothel keeper, she is disguising her true identity: the Women's Liberation blackmailer. The audience witnesses both aspects of her character; her feminist battle-cry 'WE will be the mast, the mast, the mast of woman, flying OUR flag.' (p.23) is in stark contrast to her actions as hostess, seen at the beginning of Act Two, preparing her customers for their pleasures.

And the simple honesty of the relationship which grows between Isobel Sands and Leonard Grimethorpe provides an ideal contrast to Regine's plotting:

Isobel: ...Desire shall not fail...And you remember...  
Len: What?  
Isobel: It's only a vision.  
Len: And that's what we're both after.  
Isobel: A vision...  
(They embrace) (p.50)

Isobel and Len seek a vision, a vision of love and happiness. Regine too seeks a vision and she attempts to make her vision reality by acting out her role as mistress of a high class bordello. However, like so many Osborne performers, Archie Rice, Maitland, Pamela, her performance fails and her vision does not materialize.

Of Watch It Come Down, John Peter wrote:

The play...is a long lyrical snarl at a society disintegrating in aimless prosperity and a group of people consuming themselves and each other in ritual wounding sessions. (24)

Peter's comments recall some of the dominant themes of early Osborne and in the previous chapter it was suggested that there is much in Watch It Come Down to link it with Look Back In Anger. Significantly, in terms of the discussion in this chapter, a great deal of the Jimmy/Alison conflict is repeated in the matrimonial clashes between Ben Prosser and his wife, Sally. However, whereas in the earlier play Jimmy performs his set-piece rhetoric in order to elicit a reaction from his companions and, particularly, his wife, in Watch It Come Down it is the woman, Sally, who is granted the Osborne gift of oratory; it is she who performs to elicit a reaction from her husband:



Ben: Oh, knock it off for five minutes. Do your cabaret somewhere else.

Sally: You wouldn't believe it, but it goes down well with some people.

Ben: Oh, I believe. There's always a public for vulgarity and cruelty if it's put over well. Try the working mens clubs. (p.14)

Once in her stride, Sally's gifts of venomous rhetoric are easily identifiable as being in the same tradition as the early Osborne heroes:

Ben: Living in the country! All ex-housemasters, rear admirals, prying vicars, prowling group captains, ladies with walking sticks and scarves, tombolas, pony events and the Daily Telegraph. And they wonder why we won't go to their sherry parties! Sherry!

Sally: I don't know why you're surprised. I grew up in it. The people are just more common and self-conscious, that's all. After all, it was your idea to get away from the messianic miseries of metropolitan Albion. The town is people and having to give way. The country's not green much and rarely pleasant. Land is bad for people. The green belt of muddied, grasping, well-off peasants from public schools and merchant banks.

Ben: Look who's talking!

Sally: I know what I'm talking about. With shotguns in the woods, tea and pearls, rural swank and a tub of money under the chintz four-poster. Fetes opened by local TV celebrities, restoration funds, old ducks who 'come in and do', village greens, hunting 'manners', indifferent foods and pewter candlesticks, over-healthy children home for the hols, greedy Gorgon nannies, undergraduates fumbling behind bushes of floodlit lawns, dancing till dawn with Miss Sarah Crumpet-Nicely of Grasping Hall while Mummy and Daddy look on at all the young people 'having such a good time' against this nasty, brutish issue of English Country Life. No, there's not much life in the land. Fish and animals yes; and the pigs who own it and run it.

Raymond: Well, can't say I've seen much of that.

Sally: Don't worry. You won't. Except as somebody's bit of a lark. Not a lower-middle-class pouf from Leicester and living with a lot of nuts in a railway station. No, land is for the truly covetous. They'll even let armies of Japs and

Texans loose on it to slaughter the pheasant, the grouse and the deer and have a Wildlife Vietnam of their own to keep what they've got. Mindless millionaires wading in the jungle warfare of the new-style trout stream-

Ben: I think you've made your point. I'm almost beginning to see theirs.

Sally: You would. You're a snob.

Her patent delight in words is reminiscent of Jimmy Porter; the reference to 'Mummy and Daddy' recalls Jimmy's outburst against his parents-in-law. Moreover, the inclusion of 'Miss Sara Crumpet-Nicely of Grasping Hall' indicates wit and a delight in the telling of a good story similar to Archie Rice's, especially when compared to his running jokes revolving around 'Capt. Charlie Double-Back-Action hyphen-Breechloading Gore of Elm Lodge, Shrewkesbury, Glos.'

There is a further link with earlier Osbornian performers via the song and dance routine:

Ben: (sings) 'At seventeen he fell in love quite madly,  
With eyes of navy blue,  
At twenty four...  
Sally: 'He groaned along once more'.  
Can't you shut up?  
Ben: No. Can you?  
'At thirty five he...'  
Sally: 'He's still alive...'  
Ben: Di di da - di da, etc.  
'But it's when he thinks he's past love...'  
Sally: He is  
(They sing together)  
Sally: )  
Ben: ) 'And he loves her as he's never loved before.  
(p.32)

However, where Jimmy Porter's music hall performance is used,

when at its most polished, to reinforce the bonds between Jimmy, Cliff and Helena, his routine can also be exceedingly bitter, and it is this bitterness which is repeated in the above lines from Watch It Come Down. A major difference between this play and its early forbears, a difference germane to this discussion, is that Sally, as the play's most obvious performer, does not dominate the action in the manner of Jimmy Porter, Archie, Luther or even Laurie. The burden of the play is more evenly shared out, rendering the presence of the actor-type far less discernible in this latest of Osborne's works for the theatre than in the vast majority of his earlier works.

## XV

In The Right Prospectus, the role of Osborne's mouthpiece falls to Heffer, the Head Boy of Grant's House at Crampton. He displays all of the rhetorical gifts that are expected of the Osborne orator, yet, in this boy of seventeen, it is obvious that the author is attempting to provide a contrast, a counterpoint to the role-playing of Newbold and his wife. Heffer is a boy acting the part of a man; Newbold is a man acting the part of a boy. Both slip into the roles readily, Heffer with relish, Newbold with a degree of reluctant acceptance:

Heffer: You will call me sir at all times and other various personages about whom you will learn in double bloody alarming time. You're neither in a doss house for scruffy-minded New Statesman wet eggs or the offspring of fecund women graduates and breast fed from Aldermaston to Grosvenor bloody Square. You will come to me here - or where - ever-I-happen-to-be-and you'll find me - every

morning after Chapel until I tell you not to - and report. It's a daft system, the whole thing but so is the Divine bloody Office, and the democratic process, one man one vote, the technological revolution where even the tin-openers don't work let alone the money system and workers and industry and the thoughts of Chairman bloody Mao. I'm not asking for your agreement, Newbold. Your views are of no interest to anyone and I doubt if they ever will be, even at Crampton. You will not cook your own food, drink, bet, smoke - either old-fashioned tobacco or pot, you will run during the hours of daylight in the House - but making no noise. You will wear the correct tie - which I see you are not - at the correct times, you will not sing, whistle, put your hands in your pockets, wear a waistcoat, use hair oil or cream, neither make nor respond to homosexual advances. You will not join any club or society, cultural, social or political until such time as you are invited or given permission by your Head of House, that is to say, me. Clear?

Newbold: Not quite, sir.

Heffer: It will be. You'll find out - we're not bloody Germans, you know. Plundering efficiency queens. This place may be chaos, Newbold, chaos to you, even to me, but it's bloody human.

Newbold: Yes, sir. I see that.

Heffer: And what is that place?

Newbold: Upton, sir.

Heffer: It's not bloody Crampton. It's Grant's.  
(pp.25/26)

Heffer, in the above speech, is acting out the role of authoritarian prefect at the same time as he fires the Osbornian shots at a selection of the author's favourite targets. The arrangement is similar to that used in West of Suez when Gillman, under the metaphorical spotlight of Mrs. James' interview session, responds with answers riddled with Osborne's traditional prejudice. What makes the Newbold/Heffer arrangement different is that both participants are obviously in the throes of a charade.

The performances of Newbold and his wife are the most obvious elements of role-play with the piece. Their performances are framed by examples, at the beginning and end of the play, of the couple in their real roles of middle-aged man and wife. Once they assume their roles as pupils, the fantasy of the piece increases. Their appearance does not alter; they do not, like Archie Rice, paint on a false exterior. However, they are, to their on-set audience, the school staff and fellow pupils, quite authentic.

Note: at no time does anyone, including staff or boys, seem aware of the age, sex or relation of the Newbolds. They are new boys. (p.19)

Their performances are perfect, even to the extent that Mrs. Newbold, pregnant and middle-aged, fits into the system with consummate ease:

41. Int. Night.

Chapel. The school sings a hymn. Newbold tries to catch his wife's eye but she's joining in blandly. She looks as content as he is uneasy...

42. Ext. Night.

Chapel. Newbold tries to catch up with his wife. He calls out to her. She turns. Smiles, rather vaguely and waves, is caught up in a crowd of boys who are all chatting. She looks full of energy, initiative - unlike her husband. (pp.31/32)

Nevertheless, convincing as the Newbolds' performances are, and as much of a mouthpiece as we find in Heffer, none of the characters in The Right Prospectus reveals the true stature of

the earlier Osborne actor-type and this continues to be true in the case of Ms or Jill and Jack, Osborne's next television play. This play is also about role reversal. However, this particular form of role reversal is somewhat different from that witnessed in The Right Prospectus. In reversing the roles of his hero and heroine, Osborne is simply extracting humour from the social status quo, and the fact that Jack is, in truth, an actor, is made all the more amusing because he is submissive-<sup>25</sup>fusses incessantly about his clothes, fails to return any of the compliments she pays him on his appearance and sulks when the rain damages a hair-style that cost him two pounds. He is not in the least like the classic Osborne actor-type, lacking the thrusting wit of Jimmy Porter and the facade of showmanship of the real performers, George Dillon and Archie Rice.

## XVI

As late as 1971, with West of Suez, Osborne's work continued to display a quality which was present from the earliest of his plays: the provision of a star role for the virtuoso performer. However, since 1970, when he played a small role in the Michael Caine film, Get Carter, Osborne has himself remained at a distance from the acting profession and this is reflected in the nature of the roles which he has created. During the early years of his writing career, he was still very much a working actor and many of his roles fall in line with his own circumstances; at the age of twenty seven, he wrote Look Back in Anger, earning himself the label 'Angry Young Man', a label more appositely to be

bestowed on Jimmy Porter. By the time Osborne reached early middle age, he had created Bill Maitland and, at the age of thirty nine, Osborne the highly successful dramatist created Laurie the highly successful writer aged 'around forty' but not middle-aged (p.87). It is significant that many of Osborne's leading characters parallel himself and, if it is recalled that he claimed to see all of the parts in his plays being acted by himself 'to perfection', then, as his acting days are left behind, it is no surprise to see the flamboyance and delight in rhetoric of the actor-type being left behind in their wake.



### Notes to Chapter Three

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1. John Osborne, 'That Awful Museum', qu. in John Russell Taylor (ed) Look Back In Anger: A Casebook. London, 1982, p.66.
2. Constance is here referring to the 'New Humber and Anglia Fisheries and Redevelopment Act' and Simon Trussler correctly points out (Trussler, p.165) that, in truth, this would at such a stage be a Bill, thus highlighting a typical Osbornian example of disregard for detail. There is a similar example in Inadmissible Evidence (p.40) when Bill offers Hudson, his managing clerk, a partnership, an impossible situation as the Law Society would not sanction an unqualified person's membership of a legal practice.
3. Alan Carter, John Osborne, Edinburgh, 1973, p.106.
4. Arnold P. Hinchcliffe. 'Whatever Happened to John Osborne' in C.W.E. Bigsby (ed) Stratford upon Avon Studies, Vol 19, London, 1981, p.62.
5. Ibid.
6. John Russell Taylor, Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama, London 1967, p.28.
7. The previous year, 1955, Peter Hall's production of Beckett's Waiting for Godot was staged at the Arts Theatre and Joan Littlewood directed and played the title role in Brecht's Mother Courage at the Devon Festival. In 1956, the Berliner Ensemble visited Britain for the first time (Brecht himself died shortly before the visit) and the Observer ran a competition for new dramatists which attracted over two thousand entries.
8. John Russell Taylor, Look Back In Anger: A Casebook, London, 1968, p.21.
9. Irving Wardle, The Times, 30 October 1968.
10. Michael Billington, The Modern Actor, London, 1973, p.164.
11. This shifting of performer/audience roles is taken to its ultimate in A Sense of Detachment.
12. The Times, 28 July 1961.
13. Martin Banham, Osborne, Edinburgh, 1969, p.51.
14. Michael Billington, The Modern Actor, London, 1973, p.170.
15. Bernard Levin, The Daily Mail, 10 September 1964.

16. Alan Carter, John Osborne, Edinburgh, 1969, p.94.
17. Ronald Hayman, John Osborne, London 1976, p.58.
18. Harold Ferrar, John Osborne, Columbia, 1973, p.41.
19. Alan Carter, John Osborne, Edinburgh, 1969, p.112.
20. Michael Billington, The Modern Actor, London, 1973, p.170.
21. Alan Carter, John Osborne, Edinburgh, 1969, p.118.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid, p.121.
24. John Peter, The Times Educational Supplement, 26 February 1976.
25. Ronald Hayman, John Osborne, London, 1976, p.106.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE HOMOSEXUALS

In The Modern Actor, Michael Billington wrote of Look Back in Anger:

Then there is the preoccupation with homosexuality which punctuates nearly all Osborne's early work and which comes naturally to a member of a profession that spends a lot of the time asking 'Is he or isn't he?'.  
(1)

and of Osborne's latest stage play, Watch It Come Down, Irving Wardle wrote:

There is the usual ambiguous treatment of homosexuality.(2)

Throughout almost all of Osborne's work there is an element of homosexuality which varies from being merely passing humorous reference to dominant theme: from Archie Rice's 'Lady Rosie Bothways' joke to the source of Alfred Redl's isolation from society. In Chapter One, there is a reference to Michael Anderson's Anger and Detachment:

...hardly any of Osborne's protagonists can be said to be normal in the conventional sense of the word. Only A Patriot for Me has homosexuality as its central subject, but one Osborne character after another betrays a fascination with the theme. (3)

It would be reasonable to search for the origins of this fascination in Osborne's days at Public School, but according to the author this would be a fruitless quest:

As far as I discovered there was no evidence of homosexuality. I may have been deceived as I thought little about it. Sex meant masturbation or girls, women, older women and, most coveted of all, married women like Mrs. Wilson.(4)

However, Osborne's early days in repertory and on tour seem to provide some evidence of an awareness of homosexuality as an element within the theatrical coterie. Of an occasion when he was wildly rebuked for his affair with Stella Linden whilst on tour, he remarked of the company management:

...perhaps Barry O'Brien and Michael Hamilton had a policy of discouraging heterosexuality within their touring companies. (5)

and a little later he adds to the suggestion of a homosexual ambience within certain sectors of his profession:

Brighton was still the Mecca of the dirty weekend...Stella and I had spent a whole week in a place called Moss Mansions, which was a temple reserved entirely for this purpose. The whole building smelt of salty sex and frying pans. The stamping ground of Binkie, Terry Rattigan, Cuthbert Worsley, an entrenched outpost of the theatrical homosexual prevailing cadre. (6)

Thus, it is clear, from Osborne's own pen, that homosexuality was in evidence during his early years in the theatre and it is therefore a logical progression, or at least an understandable

one, to find evidence of it in his work, bearing in mind the previously identified theatrical themes within his plays.

As Michael Anderson has already claimed, only A Patriot For Me has homosexuality as its central subject, and it was in many ways unfortunate that Osborne's choice of central subject should have led to such difficulty with the Lord Chamberlain, as this inevitably resulted in some of the impact of the play's earlier scenes being lost:

...the play's censorship troubles...ensured that its theme was notorious long before the curtain rose on its first night. (7)

The result of all of this notoriety was that the audience was aware of Redl's homosexuality before the text allows that he should realise it himself and, while this obviously dulls the edge of surprise for the audience, it ensures that the play survives on strengths other than simply shock tactics (and the success of the 1983 Chichester production seems to reinforce this view).

Like much of Osborne's work, A Patriot for Me concerns isolation; Jimmy Porter has been isolated by his education from his own class, but is not accepted by his wife's; Archie Rice is isolated from his profession because it is dying around him and he cannot adapt to or come to terms with its replacement; and Bill Maitland is isolated, socially and professionally, because he fails to concentrate his mind sufficiently to succeed at home or at work. Alfred Redl is isolated because of his sexuality

and, although this is of much less significance, his Jewishness.

As a young officer in the Imperial Austrian Army, Redl goes to great lengths to conform to the expected stereo type:

He has close cropped hair, a taut compact body, a moustache. In most scenes he smokes long black cheroots. (p.13)

and he also strives towards heterosexuality. Indeed, as stated above, in the early parts of the play, he is unaware of his homosexuality and he engages in the normal round of wining and wenching with his comrades. He attempts a rather unsuccessful session with Hilde, a young prostitute from the restaurant favoured by the young officers, and in the course of the session he discovers that a colleague is in the next cubicle with a young waiter. This has the effect of bringing the notion of homosexuality into the open for the play's audience and for Redl. Nevertheless, it is via the medium of a heterosexual affair that the Russian Espionage Service hopes to trap Redl, whom they have identified as a potential agent.

But, Redl is unable to form a satisfactory relationship with his procured mistress, Countess Delyanoff:

Redl: Do you know; the only time I drink heavily is when I'm with you? No, I didn't mean that. But when you're badgering me and sitting on my head and, and I can't breathe.

Countess: Why do you always have to make love to me with the...

Redl: There you go!

Countess: Why? Why do you insist? Before we ever begin?

Redl: I might ask you why you insist on turning the light on.  
 Countess: Because I want to look at your face. Is that so strange?  
 Redl: You must know, you must know, we're not all the same.  
 Countess: Why do you never kiss me?  
 Redl: But I do.  
 Countess: But never in bed.  
 Redl: Oh, let's go back. We're tired.  
 Countess: And turn your head away?  
 Redl: Damn your eyes, I won't be catechized.  
 Countess: Why do you never speak?  
 Redl: What do you want out of me? Well, I tell you, whatever it is, I can't give it. Can't and won't.  
 (pp.59/60)

Redl slowly becomes aware of his sexual confusion, but it falls to a young man in a street cafe (see Chapter Three) to confront Redl with the truth, 'I know what you're looking for' (p.67), and once Redl allows himself to submit to his true emotions, he realises that he has entered a society markedly different from the gentility of life with Countess Delyanof and her coterie:

(A bare, darkened room. In it is a bed. On it two figures, not yet identifiable. A light is struck. A cigar end glows.)

Redl's Voice: Why wouldn't you keep the light on? (A figure leaves the bed and goes to a wash basin. Sound of water.) Um? Oh! Why did I wait - so long. (Redl lights a lamp beside the bed. By the washstand is the handsome form of a young private soldier.) Paul?  
 Paul: Yes?  
 Redl: Why?  
 Paul: I don't know. I just prefer the dark.  
 Redl: But why? My darling. You're so exquisite to look on...you mean it's me?  
 Paul: No. You look all right.  
 Redl: What is it, then? What are you dressing for?  
 Paul: Got to get back to barracks, haven't I?  
 Redl: What's your unit?  
 Paul: That'd be telling, wouldn't it?  
 Redl: Oh, come on, I can find out.



Paul: Yes, General Staff and all that, isn't it?  
Redl: Paul. What is it? What have I done? What are you opening the door for?  
(Paul has opened the door. Four young soldiers come in. They look at Redl, who knows instantly what will happen. He struggles violently at first, and for a while it looks as if they might have taken on too much. The young soldiers in turn become amazed by Redl's vicious defence of himself, which is like an attack. All the while Paul dresses, pockets Redl's gold cigarette case, cigar case, watch and chain, gold crucifix, notes and change. Redl becomes a kicked, bloody heap on the floor. The soldiers leave. Paul, having dressed fully by now, helps Redl sit up against the bed, looks down at his bloody face.)  
Paul: Don't be too upset, love. You'll get used to it. (Exit) (pp68/69)

This sordid scene forms a stark contrast with the high society drag-ball which forms the following scene. Once Osborne allows Redl's homosexuality fully to emerge, it seems to open the floodgates and it would appear that, according to Osborne, almost all of the Austrian nobility and Imperial High Command is comprised of homosexuals. However, Osborne does not allow Redl to become tarnished by the high-camp revels of Baron Von Epp, and instead he concentrates in the play's second half upon Redl's qualities as a person, regardless of his sexual predilections. Osborne shows a particular strength in the manner in which Redl describes the physical attributes of the man he loves to the Countess:

Countess: ...I loved you...  
Redl: Well, I didn't love you. I love Stefan. We just fooled one another. Oh, I tried to hoax myself too, but not really often. So: tonight's your wedding night (pause). I tell you this: you'll never know that body like I know it. The lines

beneath his eyes. Do you know how many there are, do you know one has less than the other? And the scar behind his ear, and the hairs in his nostrils, which has the most, what colour they are in the light? The mole on where? Where, Sophia? I know the place here, between the eyes, the dark patches like slate - like blue when he's tired, really tired, the place for a blow or a kiss or a bullet. You'll never know like I know, you can't. The backs of his knees, the pattern on the soles of his feet. Which trouble him. And so I used to wash them and bathe them for hours. His thick waist, and how long are his thighs, compared to his calves, you've not looked at him, you never will. (p.101)

This is very far removed from Archie Rice's queer jokes; it is a sympathetic statement by Osborne concerning the sincerity and genuineness of homosexual love and it emphasises the care which the author seems to display for his leading character.

As Redl becomes more entangled in the confusion of his private life and his blackmail by the Russians, he becomes more and more isolated from society, an increasingly lonely man. He is forced to seek his affection from casual, commercial liaisons:

(Redl's apartment in Vienna. Baroque, luxurious. It is late afternoon, the curtains are drawn, the light comes through them and two figures can just be seen in bed. One is Redl who appears to be asleep. The other, the figure of a young man, is getting up very quietly, almost stealthily, and dressing. There is a rattle of coins and jewellery.)

Redl: Don't take my cigarette case, will you? Or my watch.

(The boy hesitates)

There's plenty of change. Take that. Go on. Now you'd better...hurry back.

(The boy slips out quickly, expertly. Redl sits up and lights a cigar. He gets up and puts on a beautiful dressing gown...) (p.99)

Ultimately, the pressure of loneliness, blackmail and his secret life as a homosexual leads to Redl being forced into a situation where suicide is his only choice. He kills himself in a manner which totally accords with the honour expected of an officer and a gentleman. <sup>8</sup> What Osborne claims is that Redl died a lonely man because society refuses to allow people like Redl to live. Alan Carter identifies this societal pressure as one of the play's major themes:

A Patriot for Me establishes, through a particular case, that of Redl and his homosexuality, the tragic dilemma of society's inacceptance. The play is an extensive, rambling journey into the nature of a certain kind of human existence, demonstrating in passing, that the pressure of society can destroy that which it seeks to preserve. It does this by forcing the sexual deviant to choose between being a patriot to his society or patriot to himself...Alfred Redl chose to be a special kind of patriot, one who desired to realize the personality he felt to be his honest self more than he valued his love for his country. If we all do the same, who is to say the world would not be a better place?  
(9)

In Under Plain Cover, Osborne chose to make the point that sexual preferences were a matter for private concern, and the moment they become public they would lead to disruption and unhappiness. A Patriot for Me, as Carter rightly identifies, makes the same point, but it makes it in a much more profound and serious manner. Redl became a spy and was forced to commit suicide because he was a homosexual, a character trait frowned upon by his society. Were it not frowned upon, he would have been free to continue the illustrious career that seemed to be his.

Osborne enters a similar plea in Inadmissible Evidence. Bill Maitland's fourth client is John Montague Maples, a homosexual who has been arrested for soliciting. Ronald Hayman writes:

Then, after the three women, a male client, Maples, gets Osborne back on to his homosexual hobby-horse. (10)

Hayman's words are a little harsh. The Maples scene displays none of the camp humour seen in a great deal of the work that preceded it; indeed, like Redl, Maples is created by Osborne as a figure of pity rather than of fun. The scene with Maples is a plea for personal liberty. The societal pressures which acted upon Redl similarly act, although to a lesser degree, upon Maples. The fact that he has had to become secretive in his personal life has led to his downfall and he is now confronted by the Law - he 'knew it was going to happen' (p.80) - and in this respect his experiences form a parallel to Bill's own conduct. He is expecting the law, or at least the Law Society, to confront him at any time.

Perhaps more importantly in the context of the whole play, the Maples scene serves to compound the confusion of Bill's mind. Bill's confusion, evident from the play's opening, becomes more and more extreme during the scenes with Garnsey, Tonks and Anderson, his divorce clients, played by the same actress. The arrival of Maples continues in the same vein:

(Maples comes in. It is the same actor as Jones, with some of Jones' unattractiveness but with other elements. In place of his puny arrogance and closed mind, there is a quick witted, improvising nature not without courage. His flashes of fear are like bursts of creative energy, in contrast to Jones' whining fixity and confidence.) (p.73)

Thus there is confusion once more in Bill's mind and importantly the fact that his homosexual client, Maples, can be confused with his employee, Jones - a man with whom he has daily contact - imparts a theme of homosexuality into the centre of Bill's world. Moreover, the character, Maples, needs to strike a sympathetic note with both Bill and the audience and Osborne achieves this by emphasizing the scene's plea for sexual tolerance; this would have been impossible were the offence in question of a different nature, for example, indecent assault. As a homosexual Maples, like Redl, feels isolated, unable to build a wholly satisfactory relationship. Such is the case with Bill himself; the confrontation with Maples forces Bill to accept that the two of them are alike in their compulsion to avoid the  
11  
issue. This awareness of a sense of mutual plight generates a sympathy between Bill and his client and prompts Bill to admit:

I should think Sir Richard Glover Q.C. is sure to apply the full rigour of the law and send us both down. (p.88)

Both men are threatened; in Maples' case it is the pressure of society which refuses to accept him for what he is; in Bill's case it is, as for Archie Rice, the threat from his own working environment. Archie was overtaken by his profession; Bill is being 'overtaken' by the Law Society.

There is nothing in the Maples scene, nor indeed overtly anywhere in Inadmissible Evidence, to suggest any homosexuality<sup>12</sup> in Bill's personality, unlike, as we shall see, those of Jimmy or Archie Rice. But Bill's constant search for emotional satisfaction, initially revealed in his dream trial at the beginning of the play, gives some evidence of heterosexual dissatisfaction:

I have never hoped or wished for anything more than to have the good fortune of friendship and the excitement and comfort of love, and the love of women in particular. I made a set at both of them in my way. With the first, with friendship, I hardly succeeded at all. Not really. No, not at all. With the second, with love, I succeeded. I succeeded in inflicting, quite certainly inflicting, more pain than pleasure. (p.15)

Like Jimmy Porter, who is 'tired of being hetero' (p.5), Bill's numerical success with women appears not to provide the relationship for which he is really searching. Kaplan would take this argument further:

Powerful homosexual aspirations are frequently found in persons who have never had an overt homosexual experience. And in those individuals whose heterosexual impulses have acquired an exclusive claim upon the sense of personal purpose...homosexual aspirations are routinely found; indeed they dominate the entire personality. (13)

Again, just as in his claim that 'the actor is one step behind the homosexual', Kaplan runs dangerously close to overstating his case. Nevertheless, Bill's failure to secure a satisfactory relationship with his women may suggest an element of the sexual<sup>14</sup> ambiguity previously noted as important by Billington; and this

would account for the overall sympathetic nature of the scene with the homosexual, Maples.

By the time Inadmissible Evidence was staged in London, Osborne's writing career had enjoyed some eight years' success and the plays which preceded Inadmissible Evidence display ample evidence for tracing a pattern of homosexuality or, as Hayman puts it, Osborne's 'homosexual hobby-horse.' At the beginning of this chapter are quoted Michael Billington's comments on Look Back In Anger in which he refers to 'the preoccupation with homosexuality' which is evident in Osborne's early work.

This thesis does not aim to support the view that Look Back In Anger displays a 'preoccupation with homosexuality', but there are clear implications within the text to show some ambivalence in Jimmy's nature. Throughout the play, there are passages of Jimmy's vitriol being directed against the opposite sex, but this is reinforced by clearer suggestions of perhaps latent homosexuality. It is conceivable that the passage:

Cliff: Well, shall we dance?...Do you come here often?  
Jimmy: Only in the mating season...(p.25)

is merely jokey banter between pals, but there is something rather less jokey in the lines:

Jimmy: I've just about had enough of this 'expense of spirit' lark, as far as women are concerned. Honestly, it's enough to make you become a scoutmaster or something isn't it? Sometimes I almost envy old Gide and the Greek Chorus boys. Oh, I'm not saying that it mustn't be hell for



them a lot of the time, but at least they do seem to have a cause - not a particularly good one, it's true, but plenty of them do seem to have a revolutionary fire about them which is more than you can say for the rest of us. (p.35)

Jimmy is wrong. He does have a revolutionary fire about him which gives him something distinctly in common with 'Old Gide and the Greek Chorus boys' and it should not come as too great a surprise to find that he is 'tired of being hetero'. He focuses a great deal of attention on Cliff, and although this by no means suggests that there is any kind of sexual relationship between them, it is quite clear that their friendship is a bond which transcends the limits found in a heterosexual relationship in all respects except the physical:

Jimmy: You're worth half a dozen Helena's to me or to anyone. (p84)

At the end of the play, Jimmy and Alison are reunited, but the reunion has a falseness; it rests behind their 'bears and squirrels' facade and, although the play can be interpreted as ending in hope, the hope for Jimmy and Alison is founded on make-believe. To Jimmy, Cliff is a 'loyal, generous and... good friend' (p.84). It is unlikely that Jimmy Porter could say that of any woman.

Similarly, Archie Rice displays the qualities of sexual ambiguity which, according to Billington, are to be expected in a performing artist and with which Osborne had previously endowed

Jimmy Porter. In his second front-cloth routine he challenges the audience to consider his sexual predilections:

I bet you think I have a marvellous time up here with all these posing girls, don't you? You think I have a smashing time, don't you? (pause) You're dead right! You wouldn't think I was sexy to look at me, would you? No lady. To look at me you wouldn't think I was sexy, would you? (pause) You ask him! (points to a conductor's stand). Ask him! (staring out at audience) You think I'm like that, don't you? You think I am! Well, I'm not. But he is! (Points to conductor's stand again) I'd rather have a glass of beer any day! (p.32)

Such public teasing may be no more than a failing comic's search for cheap laughs, but the germ of Osborne's idea can be traced back to his love of the music hall. In his autobiography he writes of his greatly admired Max Miller:

His make-up was white and feminine, and his skin was soft like a dowager's. This steely suggestion of ambivalence was very powerful and certainly more seductive than the common run of manhood then. (15)

However, Archie does not leave his ambiguity in the theatre after the show. Similar to the manner, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, in which his act pervades his domestic life, so his fondness for anecdotes based on homosexual themes is brought home, too:

Archie: ...I've just been talking to our coloured friend on the stairs.  
Phoebe: He's a student.  
Archie: No he's not. He's a ballet dancer.  
Phoebe: (Astonished) Is he? (to Jean) He's a big fellow.  
Archie: Playing the Winter Gardens for a fortnight. He was telling me if you drop your hat outside there now,

you have to kick it down to the promenade before you can pick it up. (Pauses quickly, then goes on, expertly) They're not all coloured, I saw a couple of 'em on the bus on the way home yesterday. They were talking together all the way, everybody listening. I just got up to press the bell, and a woman shouted out. 'I lost two boys in the war for the likes of you.' I thought she meant me for a moment, so I turned round, and there she was, beating them with her umbrella like crazy.

Billy: I don't like to see a man dancing like that.

Archie: I was in a show with a couple of male dancers once. And wherever we went, on the Monday night some woman used to complain about their tights bulging. Wherever we went. Every Monday night. I'm sure it was the same woman each time. I used to call her the camp follower. (p.35)

There is little to distinguish the above lines from Archie's scripted performance, but the fact that it is performed to his own home underlines the notion that sexual ambivalence is perhaps more than just a weapon in Archie's professional armoury.

Later, Archie again uses this fascination with sexual ambiguity in his story of a music hall trampoline artist called 'Lady Rosie Bothways - a decent sort of a lad' (p.63). (It is noteworthy that such stories of Archie's are not merely risqué jokes but they are also theatrical anecdotes, stories of dancers and acrobats which add to the theatrical ambience of the play.)

However, there is a more personal aspect to Archie's sexual ambiguity which is revealed when, mellowed by alcohol, he relates a story to his daughter:

Did I ever tell you the most moving thing that I ever heard? It was when I was in Canada - I managed to skip over the border sometimes to some people I knew, and one night I

heard some negress singing in a bar. Now you're going to smile at this, you're going to smile your educated English head off, because I suppose you've never sat lonely and half-stewed in some bar among strangers a thousand miles from anything you think you understand. But if ever I saw any hope or strength in the human race, it was the face of that old fat negress getting up to sing about Jesus or something like that. She was poor and lonely and oppressed like nobody you've ever known. Or me, for that matter. I never even liked that kind of music, but to see that old black whore singing her heart out to the whole world, you knew somehow in your heart that it didn't matter how much you kick people, the real people, how much you despise them, if they can stand up and make a pure, just natural noise like that, there's nothing wrong with them, only with everybody else. I've never heard anything like that since. I've never heard it here. Oh, I've heard whispers of it on a Sunday night somewhere. Oh, he's heard it, Bill's heard it, he's heard them singing. Years ago, poor old gubbins. But you won't hear it anywhere now. I don't suppose we'll ever hear it again. There's nobody who can feel like that. I wish to God I could feel like that old black bitch with her fat cheeks, and sing. If I'd one one thing as good as that in my whole life, I'd have been alright. Better than getting on with the job without making a fuss and all that, or doing something constructive and all that, all your rallies in Trafalgar Square! I wish to God I were that old bag. I'd stand up and shake my great bosom up and down, and lift up my head and make the most beautiful fuss in the world. Dear God, I would. But I'll never do it. I don't give a damn about anything, not even women or draught Bass...(pp.70/71)

Archie is in the throes of self-exposure, and he views himself in the persona of a seedy bar room entertainer of the opposite sex. Not only is the theme of sexual ambivalence a major element of Archie's anecdotage, on and off the stage, it also pervades his real self, which is revealed when alcohol pushes the barriers aside. Moreover, like Bill Maitland, Archie is constantly seeking sexual gratification outside his family. Phoebe is his second wife and he is reputed to have a number of mistresses at The Rockliffe (p.18). This accords with the extract from Kaplan's thesis quoted above and reinforces the idea that, with Archie Rice, Osborne has taken the sexual ambivalence suggested in a

great comedian like Miller and has developed it into a critical element of the failing Archie.

In The World of Paul Slickey, the references to homosexuality are lightweight and fall short of the serious overtones seen earlier in Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer. The lesser of the two references is a simple musical joke about an ancestor of the Mortlake family:

Now Cedric's daddy was a chappie  
Who couldn't make a damsel happy,  
He'd hardly got his bride  
Safely tucked in by his side  
When he quickly thought it wiser  
To readjust his visor  
Leaping from his bridal bed  
He preferred the friendship of his  
squire instead. (p.77)

This is simply a trite, cheap joke, reminiscent of Jimmy's 'I'm tired of being hetero' rhyme, but lacking its wit and its acerbity. Similarly, the extended sex-change joke which dominates the end of The World of Paul Slickey is little more than a poor relation of Archie Rice's 'Lady Rosie Bothways' story:

A...woman at the weekend and a man all the week  
Two days as Madame Pompadour and five as an  
Ancient Greek  
You could swap your pretty bras  
For a moustache with handlebars  
And be a woman at the weekend and a man  
all the week (pp.79/80)

These passing references to homosexuality and transvestism merely add to the confusion of themes within the play. John Russell

Taylor describes it as 'a volly of grapeshot flying off in all  
 16  
 directions' and the addition of gratuitous jokes on such  
 themes simply has the effect of providing cheap laughs.  
 Similarly, in The Blood of the Bambergs, the same sort of humour  
 is used to convey the fact that the dead Prince Wilhelm's younger  
 16  
 brother is 'too queer to provide any heirs'.

Taft: His younger brother is his rightful successor  
 and...  
 Brown: Prince Heinrich!  
 Taft: Prince Heinrich!  
 Brown: Taft, Prince Heinrich is as queer as a cucumber.  
 Taft: Queer?  
 Brown: Yes, Taft, queer. You've been in this game forty  
 years, haven't you?  
 Taft: Sir...  
 Brown: Ginger beer, Taft, pansy, one of those, cissy.  
 Compris? Bent!  
 Taft: Good Lord, young Harry.  
 Brown: Young Harry, he says, he's as bent as a bloody  
 boomerang.  
 Taft: Bent, but do you mean...  
 Brown: Well?  
 Taft: Well - that he'd never get married?  
 Brown: Married - tough luck on that poor kid.  
 Taft: But surely, sir, for the sake of his country, his  
 duty...  
 Brown: Taft, I don't know who you talk to in your job,  
 but has it never struck you as slightly odd even  
 for a young Prince, that he should divide his time  
 almost exclusively between the barracks and  
 visiting the ballet.  
 Taft: Well, naturally I thought that going to the  
 theatre was a bit eccentric.  
 Brown: And the grace and favour lavished on all those  
 interior decorators and fashion photographers.  
 Taft: I always thought they were utterly unsuitable  
 companions for...  
 Brown: Yes, yes, exactly... (pp.33/34)

However, in Luther, Osborne returned to writing in  
 which a strong central figure dominates the action, using  
 as a setting the cloistered environment of the monastery and its

implicit mystery which, as has already been observed, bears a strong resemblance to the world of the actor. As an actor-type, Martin displays the sexual ambiguity which Billington and Kaplan identify as typical actor qualities. Through the course of the play, Martin moves from asexuality, as the novice monk, to married parenthood. The cloistered lifestyle of the monastery has a mystery about it which is not unlike the world of the theatre, and the laity like the theatrical audience, are not privy to the activities of those within.

Martin, on becoming a monk, submits himself to a regimen of sexual deprivation:

He who fixes his eyes on a woman and takes pleasure in her glance, must not think that he goes unobserved by his brothers. (p.22)

There is a suggestion of homosexuality implicit in the above words; it could be argued that the sight of a fellow monk fixing his eyes upon a woman provokes jealousy.

Martin himself seems, in the play's early stages, to be more inclined to male rather than to female affection: he confesses to Hans, his father:

But I loved you the best. It was always you I wanted. I wanted your love more than anyone's, and if anyone was to hold me, I wanted it to be you. Funnily enough, my mother disappointed me the most and I loved her less, much less. She made a gap which no-one could have filled, but all she could do was make it bigger, bigger and more unbearable. (p.43)



Such words provide an interesting anticipation of some of Redl's confessional speeches in A Patriot for Me, and while they do not confirm any homosexuality in Martin, they do provide some evidence for an element of sexual ambivalence in his character.

Much of what the other characters say to or of Martin reinforces this view. 'Manhood was something you had to be flung into, my son' (p.97) says Staupitz, the Augustinian Vicar General, suggesting that Martin was perhaps happier in the asexual world before puberty, and earlier in the play, in a short exchange between Martin and his father, there is an intimation of further ambiguity:

Hans: Isn't a mother supposed to dance with her son after the ceremony? Like Christ danced with his mother? Well, I can't see her doing that. I suppose you think I'm going to dance with you instead.

Martin: You're not obliged to, father.

Hans: It's like giving away a bride, isn't it?

Martin: Not unlike.

Hans: God's eyes! Come to think of it, you look like a woman in all that!

Martin: Not any woman you'd want, father.

Hans: What do you know about it, eh? Eh? (p.37)

Again, such dialogue contains no explicit revelation of homosexuality but there is a suggestion which is not unlike the camp banter of Archie Rice's exchanges with 'Charlie' in the orchestra pit.

Martin's conversation with his father is recalled a little later when he discusses the problems of his vocation with Staupitz. The Vicar General responds:

You told me once that when you entered the cloister, your father said it was like giving away a bride, and again your father was right. You are a bride and you should hold yourself ready like a woman at conception. (p.56)

Stripped of the humour of the dialogue with Hans, Staupitz' words to Martin emphasize the submissive quality of the monks' existence and add further to the mystery which links the life of the church with that of Osborne's own cloistered environment, the theatre.

Time Present approaches the theme of homosexuality somewhat differently in that there are only passing references to it, and the most obvious seems again to be something of a cheap joke. Bernard, Pamela's agent, is the homosexual subject of some of her one-line humour. On the surface, his role is insignificant and yet with the death of Gideon Orme, Pamela's father, Bernard assumes the place of a father-figure in Pamela's life. It is Bernard who procures her abortion:

All right, listen, Bernie...you know that address book of yours? The one with the names of the gentlemen in it. Yes, Ladies' Services. Can you give me a few numbers and which names to mention when I ring?...No, of course I'm not, darling. After all this time...Yes, for a little friend...(p.60)

and, at the end of the play, Bernard 'makes an appropriately gay appearance to hump baggage and serve as chauffeur on Pamela's departure'.  
18

However, below the surface of the cheap, camp humour, there is some sympathy shown by Pamela for Bernard:

Edith: You don't have any work, any aim, hardly any friends now, except for a few...

Pamela: Homosexuals? Well, they've mostly given me up. I'm ultimately unrewarding to them. Which is just as well. Except for Bernard of course. If you're a woman or a moll you do have to spend quite a lot of energy flattering them with your sympathy and admiration and performing like captured prize dogs for them. I think Bernard's different. (p.57)

It is possible that Pamela's sympathy for Bernard stems from her own sexual ambiguity. If the theses of Billington and Kaplan are to be accepted, then it is right to search for some suggestion of homosexuality in Pamela, the actress. Both Simon Trussler and Martin Banham find it. Trussler claims:

Lesbianism is obviously latent: but where an audience was plunged into a convincing continuum of marital disharmony in Look Back in Anger, here it is asked to believe that the bickering by which Pamela and Constance measure out their stage-lives has merely put some previous understanding 'a bit out of kilter'. (19)

Reinforcing this view, Banham writes:

Pamela shares a flat with a left-wing woman MP, Constance, and there are clear indications of an unacknowledged homosexual attraction between them. (20)

At its most obvious level, this attraction is witnessed in such almost throwaway lines as:

Pamela: Oh, come off it, Constance, that's what we all need - love and friendship and a hot cuddle. And they really are on short supply. (p.37)

However, the suggestion of a more physical attraction is seen in the second act of the play:

Constance: I'll pack for you if you must...

Pamela: Don't bother. I'll leave most of it...for now. Just talk to me while I undress. (She moves between her bedroom and the drawing room dressing and packing in a casual way, talking. At one point in the bedroom she is naked. Constance wanders about following her, rather helplessly, smoking and watching her every movement.) (p.69)

During the progress of the scene, Constance remarks 'Gosh, you've got a beautiful body...You really are permanently brown all over. You haven't got those awful bra-cup marks.' (p.71) However, the weightiest evidence comes a little later:

Constance: Darling, please stay. You need love more than anyone I've ever known. And looking after. We'll both do it.

Pamela: You look after Murray, he's the sort who needs it...(p.72)

Pamela's rejection of Constance's plaintive request implies that, if there ever was anything physical between them, it is now over. Pamela, pregnant by Constance's lover, is about to leave to stay with her homosexual agent. At a time of personal difficulty, Pamela leaves the comparative security of Constance's home and affection for the safety of Bernard the homosexual: a refuge in a world of difficulty and disturbance.

In addition to the above homosexual element within the play, Time Present and also its companion piece, The Hotel in Amsterdam, contain several passing references to homosexuality, mainly there for the purpose of providing quick and easy laughs.

Referring to Abigail, the target of much of her vitriol, Pamela claims that she 'didn't know the truth about her Daddy until she found him tucked up in bed with a Greek cabin steward and the family's pet bulldog!' (p.38), while the opposition spokesman on the acts is referred to as a 'Tory poove' (p.54). On the other hand, the passing references in The Hotel in Amsterdam are less bitter and build into a running joke:

Laurie: Listen, my mother should have been Chief Stewardess on Monster's Airlines. She'd have kept you waiting in every bus, withheld information and liquor, snapped at you, and smirked meaninglessly or simply just ignored you.  
Dan: Have you ever thought of airlines for homosexuals?  
Laurie: I say: what a splendid idea. You could call it El Fag Airlines.  
Annie: Gus could be a stewardess.  
Laurie: We'd design him a divine outfit. I say I feel better already.  
Margaret: Don't get carried away. The holiday's only just started.  
Laurie: The great escape you mean.  
Gus: You mean all the aircrew would be chaps?  
Dan: And the passengers.  
Laurie: Why don't we start it? Fly El Fag. The Airlines that floats just for HIM! (p.92)

The joke is built upon and repeated throughout the play in company with its heterosexual companion, the Golden Sanitary Towel Award joke. In itself, such a joke as 'El Fag Airlines' should not arouse any suspicion of deeper meaning, but bearing in mind

that Laurie and his companions are members 'of a profession that spends a lot of its time asking "is he or isn't he?" then it should come as no surprise to find a trace of sexual ambivalence in Laurie, a prime example of the Osbornian actor-type, as has already been established in the previous chapter.

Margaret: I don't know why nice men don't like their mothers.  
Annie: Gus likes his.  
Laurie: That's because she's probably nice.  
annie: She isn't bad.  
Gus: No. I suppose she isn't really.  
Laurie: And he's a bit queer too, remember.  
Annie: That's true.  
Margaret: But you always say you are a bit.  
Laurie: So I am. But not as much as Gus.  
Amy: What about Dan?  
Laurie: Well - either less than Gus or me. Or much more. He's more elusive. I mean Gus is so obvious. Those clothes. That's real conservatism.  
Gus: Are they awful?  
Margaret: You look dishy. (pp.91/92)

This is to suggest that there is some ambiguity in both Laurie and Gus at least and, although the subject is not dwelt on, it confirms the view expressed earlier by Anderson that 'hardly any of Osborne's protagonists can be said to be normal in the conventional sense of the word<sup>(94)</sup>

As the play progresses, and the weekend in Amsterdam settles down to the social relaxation the characters seek, Laurie confesses:

No, it's not natural. It's bloody unnatural. How often do you get six people as different as we are still all together all friends and who all love each other? (p.98)

These words, to all his friends, are reminiscent of Jimmy Porter's confession to Cliff that 'you're worth half a dozen Helena's to me'. Neither Jimmy nor Laurie are overtly homosexual, but both display that ambivalence that makes the love of a man a very important element in their respective psyches.

In Osborne's later stage plays, the theme of homosexuality is still identifiable, but it is less obvious than in his earlier work and occurs in a manner which seems to reinforce a theme of isolation. In West of Suez, Wyatt Gillman is separated from his normal literary surroundings and companions, indeed Osborne emphasizes this point by leaving him alone, isolated, on stage at the end of the first act. Wyatt is fascinated by homosexuality. Robin, his daughter, remarks '...he's always asking me the same things about people he's going to meet. "Will I like him?" then "Is he a bugger or a Jew?" (p.37) and a little later, prior to the arrival of Alastair, the local hairdresser, Wyatt asks:

Wyatt: Is that nice little queer boy coming?  
Mary: Yes. He's crimping the entire family.  
Wyatt: Oh, good. I do like him. I didn't know, what's it, crimping, was such an interesting business. Like being in the mess or common room. Wish he'd do mine. He's got a splendid head of hair.  
Mary: It's a wig.  
Wyatt: Good heavens - a wig! Is it really?  
Mary: Yes, really, Daddy.  
Wyatt: Perhaps he'd get me one. How do you know it is?  
Mary: Some of us do notice these things.  
Wyatt: Did you know?  
Evangie: Yes.  
Wyatt: Robert?  
Robert: Yes, but he told me too. First time we met he said 'you know I'm just an uptight little bald Scots queen under this red rug. They all send me up and call me either the Virgin Queen or Mary, Queen of Scots! It used to upset me but now I'm not



bothered.' (p.44)

As well as the cheap laughs in the latter part of the above exchange, Wyatt's curiosity about Alastair anticipates the rather more revealing statement from Wyatt a few pages later:

Mary: Alastair's probably coming with Lamb.  
Wyatt: Lamb? What's that?  
Mary: The writer.  
Evangie: Is he? Gosh, how good.  
Wyatt: Not a writer? Oh, Lord, I hate meeting writers.  
Evangie: By why?  
Wyatt: They know about you usually. They can trip you up if they've a mind to. If they're better than me, I get all yellowy and envious, and if they're worse it just depresses me. For them. And then again, if they're bad, they perform themselves so well and amuse everyone. And if they're really good, they don't bother to perform at all, quite rightly, all lordly. Oh, dear, Lamb is it? But he's frightfully successful, isn't he, invented tax havens and things and writes best sellers?  
Christopher: I shouldn't worry about all that. Anyway, he's quite shy.  
Wyatt: Is he a bugger?  
Christophe: Almost certainly.  
Evangie: But not necessarily literally.  
Mary: And not Jewish.  
Wyatt: Is that why he's coming with little Alastair?  
Evangie: Possibly. Alastair would tell you if you ask him.  
Wyatt: Oh, no. How awful. I wonder if he takes his wig off in bed. Lamb...Lamb. I remember him. We got frightfully drunk together in some club somewhere years ago. Savile or somewhere like that. But he's frightfully impressive. Rather good too, they tell me. I remember he asked me why I pretended to be an ageing schoolboy all the time and I was so embarrassed I didn't go out for a month afterwards. Then he said to me "How queer are you?" And I was so nonplussed because we didn't talk about that much at that time. So, like an awful coward, because I was pretty sure he was, I said a bit too airily, "Oh, about forty-five per cent." And he said "Are you? How interesting, I'm ninety-five. You see, I don't trust women." And I said something foolish and gauche. Like "Oh, but

all your best friends must have been women."  
(pp.46/47)

So Wyatt, like Laurie, the writer before him, admits to a degree of sexual ambiguity. However, it is Lamb, the writer in exile, who is the true homosexual and who feels genuine isolation:

Lamb: Wish you weren't all going.

Wyatt: Still a bit of time.

Lamb: There's me and Robin. The Brigadier. Alastair chatting up the tourists in his crimping parlour. Going on his crying jags, threatening us all with his too many sleeping pills, falling in love with Young Americans he despises and who despise him. Looking to an old Etonian queen like me, who's respectable only because he's rich and famous. Turning to Jed, who hates him slightly less than the rest of us.

Wyatt: Oh, dear... (p.62)

Lamb feels his isolation deeply, and his homosexuality excludes him from sectors of the small community in which he is isolated. Alastair is a lightweight character who provides some camp comic relief, but Lamb, small though the role may be, is a focus for Osborne's sympathy whose separation from society recalls the plight of Maples in Inadmissible Evidence

This theme of the homosexual isolated from society occurs in Osborne's most recent stage play, Watch It Come Down. Again, the character in question is a writer, Glen, who is physically separated from his companions by virtue of his illness, which keeps him in his bed in an adjoining room:

The action takes place in two separated areas of what was once a country railway station. At the back of the larger section is the door leading to the deserted platform and station, which can just be seen through one of the windows. Also deep countryside in distance. On one side, what was once the booking office has become a dining room hatch. The main part of the set is obviously what was once the entrance to the station and waiting room. The smaller section, separated by a door, may have once been the parcels office. This is where GLEN is at present. Beside him, as he lies in a very large comfortable bed, covered in blankets and pillows, is a pile of books from which he is making notes. (p.9)

Glen's physical separation is reinforced by his homosexuality. Sally, in her Porter-esque acerbity, refers to him as 'an academic old pouf who lies in bed most of the day writing waspish biographies to scandalize and titivate his friends who write for the weekly newspapers - when he's not being wise and famous and discreet with his boys in the old parcels office.' (p.10)

Also in the play, Osborne casts another homosexual, Raymond, referred to as 'the quiet, dog-of-all-work homosexual who pads reliably at the heels of others' lives' (p.9) and in the opening pages of Act 1, Scene 2, both Raymond and Glen indulge in an exchange of bitchy, camp repartee:

Glen: ...books are an outmoded form of communication. Probably fascist from what I hear from my old University. Perhaps they could turn it into an old folks home for people like Ben's Mum. Think how they'd enjoy sitting in their wheelchairs in the College Gardens and watching telly in the Senior Common Room.

Raymond: Trouble is you're a snob. Even if you do like taking home guardsmen.

Glen: Of course I'm a snob. Just like some people are pigeon fanciers. And young guardsmen, believe me, Raymond, have always been in the fancy of many

an upper class queen. It does take a certain amount of coinage - like marriage. At least guardsmen are smart, alert, with bodies like fleshed out greyhounds. That's how I got my beautiful family nose broken and also the stitches over my eye. That's why I never fancied you, Raymond. Just tight trousers, a bad, working class skin, all huff and pouf.

Raymond: Some people like it.

Glen: Some people will put it in a brick wall I believe.  
(pp.23/24)

Such bitchiness does not allow any sympathy to build up around either Raymond or Glen and whereas the scene in A Patriot for Me in which Redl is beaten up by a young soldier's companions reinforces the audience's sympathy for Redl, Glen's story of similar events is merely funny. It seems that, as neither Glen nor Raymond is in the centre of Osborne's canvas, he is unable or unwilling to endow them with the sympathetic qualities seen in Redl, and, to a lesser degree, in Maples.

However, Osborne does develop his homosexual theme in Watch It Come Down in a direction just intimated Time Present. It has already been observed that there is a suggestion of a lesbian relationship in Time Present, between Pamela and Constance. In Watch It Come Down, Osborne extends this into an overt declaration of lesbian love. Sally, Ben's wife, and Jo, the homely companion to Glen, engage in a love scene which, following the bitter violence of the quarrel between Sally and Ben which closes the first act, forms something of an emotional oasis:

Sally: He did. The best of a poor world for you both...Do you love me?

Jo: Yes. I always have.

Sally: Like you love Ben?  
 Jo: Oh, same only different. You know...  
 Sally: Because I've got to love you. Gotten, as the Americans say. You rouse my inside with - with - your caprice, your enthusiasm, your odd, withdrawn moods. Your strong, thriving body, your sturdy legs and hard arms, I...  
 Jo: Yes?  
 Sally: No. Glen's in your being now.  
 Jo: You can't drive that out.  
 Sally: No.  
 Jo: Do you want to make love to me?  
 Sally: Yes. I want to kiss you. On the mouth. My tongue between your bright teeth. I want to hold you in my arms a whole night with our bodies like twin fortresses, lap in lap. I want to see you wake up and look down at me and get me awake...May I kiss You?  
 Jo: As long as you want. I want you to.  
 (They kiss, gently, forcibly.)  
 Sally: They'd call us a couple of old diesels.  
 Jo: Who cares? Glen wouldn't.  
 Sally: Jo...Let's go away. When it's all over. And you think you can and still want to. I know it's not the time but, yes, it is the time. Because it's running out, and we should be running away, running away together where we see fit or fine...I really do love you. I'm tired of the bodies of men. They've gone through my life and I'm just like a, oh, closed line, service discontinued. We could go on for as long as we like. Oh, Jo, I want to hold you and cuddle you and rest in your body..  
 Jo: My darling.  
 (They kiss again.)  
 Sally: Oh, your body. The next few weeks, months, will be foul. But be patient. I've tried to learn. Give us a chance. No one else will. We'll dress in what we want, go where we like, think of each other as well as the rest. You are so - near. Dear. Don't let this chance slide. It won't occur again. Other lines aren't the same.  
 Jo: What about Ben?  
 Sally: Ben thinks he needs me. I thought so. But he'll be so relieved. Especially if it's you and me. He might even make a film out of it. Promise! Say promise! No. don't say. Just nod...  
 (Jo nods. They embrace.) (pp.44/45)

In the previous chapter, it was noted that Sally is in the tradition of the Osbornian actor-type and it is, therefore, not too great a surprise to find the sexual ambiguity, which is

discernible in so many of Osborne's performers, evident in Sally. Unfortunately, the sexual ambiguity is rather overdone, for, in addition to being in love with Jo, Sally is of course married to Ben. Also, Ben and Jo claim to be in love with each other (p.47) and Glen, the dying homosexual, is in love with Jo (p.48). This cross-threading of relationships is further compounded by the suggestion (p.14) of homosexuality in Ben's character. In his review of the play. John Peter suggested that Osborne's casual approach to homosexuality in his work was a 'sure sign of a heterosexual writer trying to take a taboo subject in his stride'.<sup>21</sup> His ability to deal with the subject, in the light of A Patriot for Me should not be in doubt, but in Watch It Come Down he has taken the theme too far. In comparison with the sexual convolutions of Ben and his companions, Archie Rice would be quite justified in claiming, "Thank God I'm normal".

In the later television plays, Osborne has allowed the homosexual theme to descend to a level of considerably lesser significance. Only in You're Not Watching Me Mummy is homosexuality overtly portrayed, in the person of Leslie, Jemima's dresser, and he is much more of a caricature than one of Osborne's truly roundly drawn homosexuals, Redl being the obvious contrast. Much of his homosexuality is the source of humour:

Jemima: Sometimes I wish I'd let Paramount bully me into that nose job after all.

Leslie: Lose that...

Jemima: I know, and I lose my unique stage presence and a decent nose. Like Jean, she's got a super nose.

Doesn't matter she's such a hopeless actress.  
(pause) What about my tits?  
Leslie: Lovely - if that's what the men like.  
Jemima: To hell with the men! What about these? (she hoists  
her breasts up for examination. They stare at  
them.)  
Leslie: No use asking me really, is it? (pp.16/17)

Such dialogue is not too far removed from the level of Archie Rice's patter; it is there to promote laughter, and in this sense, it works. But it does not serve to make any statement on behalf of or against the homosexual and the play is thus far removed from the more serious ground of Redl, Maples and even the later stage plays.

Of the other television plays of the 1970 s, perhaps The Right Prospectus would seem appropriate territory through which to search for evidence of the homosexual theme, but it is not to be found. There is the odd passing mention. Heffer, the head of Grant's House at Crampton School, in his statement of house rules tells Newbold:

You will wear the correct tie...you will not sing, whistle, put your hands in your pockets, wear a waistcoat, use hair oil or cream, neither make nor respond to homosexual advances. (p.25)

And later in the same scene he repeats this view of homosexual relationships. 'I'm not having any affairs in Grant's if I can help it' (p.28). Bearing in mind Osborne's own remarks about public school homosexuality quoted at the beginning of this chapter, such statements are not surprising. What is odd is that,



bearing in mind the abundance of the homosexual theme in the majority of his works for the stage, it comes as a small surprise to find the theme almost ignored in a play set in such a traditionally accepted setting for adolescent homosexuality.

Similarly, in Ms or Jill and Jack, a play concerning the reversal of the social roles of the sexes, it would be fair to assume a homosexual element. Yet Osborne himself makes clear that 'neither Jack nor Mark are remotely "gay", to use the fashionable cant word' (p.64), and although Jack, an actor, is constantly concerned for his hairstyle and his wardrobe, it is a concern stemming from Osborne's reversal of the social role which is at the root of this, not any suggestion of homosexuality.

It is difficult to decide upon a precise reason for the absence of a homosexual theme in the television plays when the theme is such a regular feature of the stage plays from Look Back in Anger to Watch It Come Down. Certainly it cannot be that Osborne has had an eye to censorship in his writing for television. The matter has never troubled him before so it would be unrealistic to propose that as a reason now. Moreover, several of his published plays have not been performed, so the risk of being denied a production does not seem to worry him either. It may simply be that, as the world of television is somewhat removed from the world of the theatre, the 'preoccupation' with homosexuality, which is so closely linked with the theatre and the actor-types, is less of an influence upon the author.

NOTES: Chapter Four

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1. Michael Billington, The Modern Actor, 1973, pp.164/165
2. Irving Wardle, The Times, 25 February 1975.
3. Michael Anderson, Anger and Detachment: A Study of Arden, Osborne and Pinter, London, 1976, p.33.
4. John Osborne, A Better Class of Person, Harmondsworth, 1982, p.135.
5. Op. Cit. p.200.
6. Op. Cit. p.208.
7. Simon Trussler, The Plays of John Osborne, London, 1969, p. 140.
8. A transcript of The Times article, 'Suicide of an Austrian Officer', dated 30 May 1913, which Osborne used as the basis of his play is contained within the appendix to this thesis.
9. Alan Carter, John Osborne, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 103.
10. Ronald Hayman, John Osborne, London, 1976, p.68.
11. Alan Carter, John Osborne, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 94.
12. In a production which I directed in Germany in 1976, during one of the later rehearsals, the actor playing Bill quite spontaneously reached out and touched Maples' hand during the interview. The business was not kept in, but it suggested at the time that some deeper feeling than a mere solicitor/client relationship may be evident.
13. Donald M. Kaplan, 'Homosexuality and American Theatre', The Tulane Drama Review, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1968, pp.38/39.
14. Michael Billington, The Modern Actor, London, 1973, pp.164/165.
15. John Osborne, A Better Class of Person, Harmondsworth, 1982, p.205.
16. John Russell Taylor, Anger and After, London, 1969, p.51.

17. Ronald Hayman, John Osborne, London, 1976, p.68.
18. Simon Trussler, The Plays of John Osborne, London, 1969, p.166.
19. Op. Cit. p.160.
20. Martin Banham, Osborne, Edinburgh, 1969, p.103.
21. John Peter, The Times Educational Supplement, 18 January 1975.

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## A P P E N D I X

Details of the first performances of John Osborne's plays  
with a selection of extracts from the press reviews.

## LOOK BACK IN ANGER

First Performance: Royal Court Theatre, 8th May, 1956

Jimmy Porter - Kenneth Haigh  
Cliff Lewis - Alan Bates  
Alison Porter - Mary Ure  
Helena Charles - Helena Hughes  
Col Redfern - John Welsh

Directed by Tony Richardson

His bitterness produces a fine flow of savage talk, but it is basically a bore because its reasons are never fully explained.....

The repetitiousness cries out for the knife. But, through all the author's overwriting and laborious shock tactics, we can perceive what a brilliant play this young man will write when he has got this one out of his system and let a little sunshine into his soul.

(Cecil Wilson, Daily Mail, 9th May, 1956)

The author, and the actors too, did not persuade us wholly that they really 'spoke' for a lost, maddened generation. There is the intention to be fair-even to the hated bourgeois parents of the cool and apparently unfeeling wife who is at length brought to heel by a miscarriage. The trouble seems to be in the overstatement of the hero's sense of grievance: like one of Strindberg's women-haters, he ends in a kind of frenzied preaching in an empty Neither we in the audience, nor even the other Bohemians on the stage with him are really reacting to his anger. Numbness sets in.

(Philip Hope-Wallace, Manchester Guardian, 9th May 1956)

Look Back in Anger.... sets up a wailing wall for the latest post war generation of under-thirties. It aims at being a despairing cry but achieves only the stature of a self-pitying snivel.

(Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 9th May, 1956)

[Look Back in Anger] is intense, angry, feverish, undisciplined. It is ever crazy. But it is young, young, young.

(John Barber, Daily Express, 9th May, 1956)

I agree that Look Back in Anger is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it at roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of twenty and thirty. And this figure will doubtless be swelled by refugees from other age groups who are curious to know precisely what the contemporary young pup is thinking and feeling. I doubt if I could love anyone who did not wish to see Look Back in Anger. It is the best young play of its decade.

(Kenneth Tyrn, The Observer, 13th May, 1956)



## THE ENTERTAINER

First Performance: Royal Court Theatre, 10th April, 1957

Billy Rice - George Relph  
Jean Rice - Dorothy Tutin  
Phoebe Rice - Brenda de Banzie  
Archie Rice - Laurence Olivier  
Frank Rice - Richard Pasco  
Britannia - Vivienne Drummond  
William Rice - Aubrey Dexter  
Graham - Stanley Meadows

Directed by Tony Richardson

I do not believe that a man like Archie, with no strength of character, and no positive conviction of any kind could have borne his disasters with such bruised panache. That is why I call Mr Osborne's play sentimental. But its theatrical effect is enormous. Splendid as Sir Laurence is when showing us Archie on the stage, he is even finer when he gets home to his squalid drunken family. There are ten minutes, from the moment when he begins telling his daughter, with a defiant, ashamed admiration, of a negress singing a spiritual in some low night club, to his breakdown on hearing of his son's death, when he touches the extreme limits of pathos. You will not see more magnificent acting than this anywhere in the world.

(Harold Hobson, The Sunday Times, 14th April, 1957)

.....there is a decided sloppy and unhurried look about the writing. The first act is repetitious and dawdling. There is no coherent link between the disparate members of this odd family. Characterisations are inconclusive and inconsistent. And the dialogue often flows with sticky reluctance yet The Entertainer has the overwhelming merit of being a play that is vital, contentious and contemporary. With a more compact production - perhaps a composite set - and some ruthless pruning it could be converted into something more satisfying than a play of promise.

(Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 11th April, 1957)

Mr Osborne has had the big and brilliant notion of putting the whole of contemporary England on to one and the same stage. The Entertainer is his diagnosis of the sickness that is currently afflicting our slap-happy breed. He chooses, as his national microcosm, a family of run down vaudevillians. Grandad, stately and retired, represents Edwardian graciousness, for which Mr Osborne has a deeply submerged nostalgia. But the key figure is Dad, Archie Rice, a fiftyish song and dance man reduced to appearing in twice nightly nude review. This is the role that has tempted Sir Laurence to the Royal Court after twenty nine years.

With Sir Laurence in the saddle, miracles.... come often. At the end of the first act, Archie is struggling to tell his daughter about the proudest encounter of his life, the one occasion when he was addressed with awe. "Two nuns came towards me," he says. "Two nuns.....". All at once he is strangled by self-disgust. The curtain falls on an unfinished sentence. Sir Laurence brings the same virtuosity to Archie's last story about a little man who went to heaven and, when asked what he thought of the glory, jerked up two fingers, unequivocally parted. The crown, perhaps, of this great performance is Archie's jocular, venomous farewell to the audience. 'Let me know where you're working tomorrow night - and I'll come and see you'.

.....Mr Osborne has planned a gigantic social moral and carried it out in a colour range too narrow for the job. Within that range, he has written one of the great acting parts of our age. Archie is a truly desperate man and to present desperation is a hard dramatic achievement. To explain and account for it, however, is harder still, and that is the task to which I would now direct this dazzling self-bound writer.

(Kenneth Tynan, The Observer, 14th April, 1957)

The Entertainer is not shocking. It is sneering. And it is slackly written, slow and boring. Good as their performances are it diminishes the stature of Sir Laurence Olivier and Miss Dorothy Tutin who are enmeshed in it.

(Derek Monsey, Sunday Express, 14th April, 1957)

The Angry Young Man may consider himself a Lucky Young Man after Laurence Olivier's performance as a drunken song-and-dance music hall comedian in last night's successor to Look Back in Anger. It was the most eagerly awaited first night of the year.

As if the combination of Olivier and Osborne were not enough to electrify the theatre, there was also Dorothy Tutin returning to the stage after her long illness.

Could any play live up to such exciting promise? Possibly, but not this one.  
(Cecil Wilson, Daily Mail, 11th April, 1957)

## EPITAPH FOR GEORGE DILLON

First Performance: Royal Court Theatre, 11th February, 1958

Josie Elliot - Wendy Craig  
Ruth Gray - Yvonne Mitchell  
Mrs Elliot - Alison Leggatt  
Norah Elliot - Avril Elgar  
Percy Elliot - Toke Townley  
George Dillon - Robert Stephens  
Geoffrey Colwyn-Stuart - Philip Locke  
Mr Webb - Paul Bailey  
Barney Evans - Nigel Davenport

Directed by William Gaskill

Epitaph for George Dillon.....has had an airing at the Oxford Club [26th February, 1957] and is now presented to London - very well produced by William Gaskill - at the Royal Court Theatre. It sheds some light on the Osborne case, for this hero, too, has what you might call a Chatterton complex. In Look Back in Anger, Jimmy Porter emerged as a clearer 'case' than young Dillon, who is less vituperative and possibly less of a young swine than the more famous and later 'hero of our times'. He is seen here in an amusing and fairly objective context of 'lower middles' on whom he is sponging.

He is an out-of-work actor, who cannot get a serious comedy produced (until it is 'dirtied up' and put on in a Welsh resort - as a farce). He is mothered by a woman who has lost her own son. In return, he seduces her daughter and has a shot at her sister too, a rangy ex-leftist who also finds the world blame-worthy in not taking her at her own valuation. Then we hear that Dillon has consumption. Success of a kind brings no consolation and he collapses sobbing and coughing in his landlady's arms, very much sorrier for himself than even the most sympathetic of us in the audience is likely to be.

This is a muddled piece of playwrighting and looks clumsy beside such rather similarly angled comedies of frustrated youth - Ackland's After October and Mackenzie's Musical Chairs. The pretentious tone adopted for scolding of the world for not being welcoming enough throws many of the scenes out of tune and even distorts the characterization now and again. Faces are smacked as in pulp-magazine stories. High-tea humours are laid on too thick. But the study of the failure himself is built up with some theatrical effect and the central scene could come from a much more interesting play. Robert Stephens and Yvonne Mitchell played it well, though neither player could perfectly suggest a 'real' background to these rebels.

(Philip Hope-Wallace, Manchester Guardian, 13th February, 1958)

Now that John Osborne has become the hottest thing in English Letters, forgotten cupboards and bottom drawers are being ransacked for his early manuscripts. Epitaph for George Dillon .....written in collaboration with Anthony Creighton and before both Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer, plumbs the familiar depths of steady despair.

Everything is here that we associate with an Osborne play. A bitter contempt for contemporary social values, a background of middle class frustration. a biting wit that lacerates as it rips apart smug shibboleths and a lacquer of slick protest that seems closer to self-pity than genuine anger.

Of all Osborne's failures, George Dillon is the most pathetic. He is the artist who discovers late in life that he has no talent....

EPITAPH FOR GEORGE DILLON (cont'd)

In its evocation of shallow, tasteless, lifeless, middle class domesticity, in its revelation of what a second-rate artist feels when he resigns himself to being forever second-rate, in its flair for cynical pugnacious dialogue, Epitaph for George Dillon is telling and hypnotic theatre.  
(Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 12th February, 1958)

## THE WORLD OF PAUL SLICKEY

First performance (London) at the Palace Theatre, 5th May, 1959

Copy Boys - David Harding, Julian Bolt  
Telephonist - Norma Dunbar  
Jo - Irene Hamilton  
Jock Oakham/Paul Slickey - Denis Lotis  
Common Man - Ken Robson  
Naval Men - Ben Aris, Geoffrey Webb  
Deidre Rawley - Maureen Quinney  
Lady Mortlake - Marie Lohr  
Trewin - Adam Turner  
Michael Rawley - Jack Watling  
Mrs Giltedge-Whyte - Janet Hamilton-Smith  
Lord Mortlake - Harry Welchman  
Gillian Giltedge-Whyte - Janet Gray  
Schoolgirls - Pamela Miller, Patricia Ashworth  
Guide and Journalist - Geoffrey Webb  
Photographer - Charles Schuller  
Wendover - Ben Aris  
George - Tony Sympson  
Lesley Oakham - Adrienne Corri  
Fr Evilgreene - Philip Locke  
Edna Francis-Evens - Jane Shore  
Cornelia Tuesday - Anna Sharkey  
Belgravia Lumley - Patricia Ashworth  
Ida Merrick - Stella Claire  
Terry Maroon - Roy Stone  
  
Directed by John Osborne  
Music by Christopher Whelan

The first night audience..... seemed to be about equally divided between those who loathed it politely and those who hated it audibly.

The final curtain came down to the most raucous note of displeasure heard in the West End since the war, and it remained open to the critic only to decide that the lynching was unjustified or to conduct a post-mortem.

John Osborne, of course, was ripe for failure. As the author of three plays brimming over with successful bile and of innumerable newspaper articles demanding the most immaculate standards of moral and intellectual judgement from which he should be... pleased that he is being judged on no mean level.

It is inconceivable to me that Osborne's experience did not warn him that this pot-pouri of indignation and aimless abuse would not fit comfortably into the innocuous framework of a musical comedy.

You cannot reduce complex social and political arguments to the level of a few cheap jibes tossed off in a lyric or a choreographic spasm and hope to have them taken seriously. (Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 6th May, 1959)

With much of what John Osborne was evidently trying to say in The World of Paul Slickey I heartily agreed. In his manner of saying it I found no shape, no form, and singularly little humour; and my mood changed as the evening wore on, from anticipation to uncomfortable boredom. (Alex Atkinson, Punch, 13th May, 1959)

In The World of Paul Slickey John Osborne rides his hobby horse in all directions. There seems to be a certain amount of malice in regard to this talented writer. I cannot guess why except that gratuitous venom is one of the inane pastimes of the theatre world and disaster is always cheerfully appreciated there.



## THE WORLD OF PAUL SLICKEY (Cont'd)

In the present instance I should judge that Osborne has been his own worst enemy. Self-loathing appears to be a driving force of his art. He should control it: he is not as bad as he thinks. He has only to regard his new effort simply as a lesson in How Not To Write a Musical Comedy. He might also repeat to himself a thousand times: 'Success is harder to withstand than failure.'

'Slickey' covers too much ground. To satirize everything at once is futile as well as excessive. The show begins as a lampoon of the cheap gossip sheets. Good. But a 'psychological' element is introduced. Jack Oakham alias Paul Slickey really is a good fellow who wants to live a decent life. But 'circumstances', as Brecht puts it, 'will not have it so'.

The play strikes out at Tory politics and personalities, at the Labour Party, at the West End theatre and its critics, at religion, at television, at women, at homosexuality and ultimately at sex itself. When one throws punches wildly one is sure to miss. (The Observer, 10th May, 1959)

## LUTHER

First Performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 27th July, 1961

Knight - Julian Glover  
Prior - James Cairncross  
Martin - Albert Finney  
Hans - Bill Owen  
Lucas - Peter Duguid  
Weinand - Dan Meaden  
Tetzel - Peter Bull  
Stoupitz - George Devine  
Cajetan - John Moffat  
Miltitz - Robert Robinson  
Leo - Charles Kay  
Eck - James Cairncross  
Katherine - Meryl Gourley  
Monks, Lords, Peasants  
and Singers - Stacey Davies, Murray Evans, Derek Fuke,  
Malcolm Taylor, John Kirk, Ian Partridge, Frank  
Davies, Andrew Poormain and David Read  
Children - Roger Hanbird and Paul Large.

Directed by Tony Richardson

.....Luther is not a Christian play. It is merely a play in which Christianity comes off better than we might have expected. This is partly due to Mr Osborne's generosity of temperament and partly to his dramatic method, which is to present the problems his play involves in successive different lights, about the ultimate validity of which his audiences can make up their own minds. Thus, in the first act, with sombre and beautiful services making Luther sick, the Church is presented, even in its purity, as death. In the second, when the abuses enter, the defence enters also, and Luther is justified by the invention of relics and the sale of indulgences as the Church itself is justified by Cajetan's prophetic glimpse of these dividing frontiers which even now imperil our safety.....In fact, all through the play, as soon as one line of thought or emotion is presented it is broken off, and another offered, in relevant and stimulating criticism.

The advantage of this method is that it appeals to the mind; the disadvantage, dramatically, that it does not, and by design cannot develop a crescendo of excitement. At every individual scene is written with vigour and imagination, the first three of the four big speeches are very good pieces of rhetoric, the interview between Luther and Cajetan is silky, subtle and witty, and when he likes, Mr Osborne shows that he can use ordinary dramatic construction as skilfully as any conventional craftsman. The constant tortures of Luther in his recollections and dreams of children are beautifully gathered up and banished in the exquisite final scene. (Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 30th July, 1961)

Osborne's Luther is, if anything, too rigidly shaped. It falls into chapters rather than scenes: perhaps because John Osborne has limited himself as a source mainly to Erik Erikson's psycho-analytical study Young Man Luther. But within each chapter, Luther's language is as sinewy and muscular as the verse of Dryden. (Sunday Telegraph, 30th July, 1961)

In form the play is sedulously Brechtian, an epic succession of tableaux conceived in the manner of Galileo; and the graph of its development is likewise Galilean - a rebel against papist dogma publishes heresies and is asked by velvet-gloved officialdom to recant. The difference is that Luther rejects the demand; all the



same, Mr Osborne's final scene is an obvious echo of Brecht's. The protagonist, having settled for domesticity, is seen smacking his lips over a good meal, conscious the while that he has betrayed the peasants who revolted in his name, just as Galileo betrayed the cause of scientific enlightenment. We are left with a powerful impression of a man who invented the idea of the individual conscience, responsible to no earthly authority, and was rocked by his own invention, a man, as Cajetan puts it, who hates himself and can only love others.

The language is urgent and sinewy, packed with images that derive from bone, blood and marrow; the prose, especially in Luther's sermons, throbs with a rhetorical zeal that has not often been heard in English historical drama since the seventeenth century, mingling gutter candour with cadences that might have come from the pulpit oratory of Donne. And it can readily swerve into comedy, as the long harangue of the indulgence salesman, offering snake-bite remedies against the mental nip of the serpent in Eden.

Always the play informs; one's reservation must be that it too seldom excites; the thrusting vigour of its style goes into exposition rather than action. Yet I count it (to burn a boat or two) the most dignified piece of dramatic writing to have dignified our theatre since Look Back in Anger. (Kenneth Tynan, The Observer, 9th July, 1961)

## PLAYS FOR ENGLAND

First performed at the Royal Court Theatre, 19th July, 1962

### The Blood of the Bambergs

Wimple - James Cossins  
Cameraman - John Maynard  
Lemon - Billy Russell  
Floor Assistant - Barbara Keogh  
Brown - Glyn Owen  
Taft - Graham Crowden  
Withers - Anton Rodgers  
Guards - Tony Caunter, Jimmy Gardner  
Russell - John Meillon  
Footmen - Charles Lewson, Norman Allen, John Maynard  
Woman - Avril Elgar  
Melanie - Vivian Pickles  
Archbishop - Alan Bennett  
Reporters - Robin Chapman, Barbara Keogh, Tony Counter,  
Constance Lorne, Jimmy Gardner.

Directed by John Dexter

.....the framework provides Mr Osborne with his chance to get his own back on almost everybody. It has moments of both high and low comedy. It says some things that needed saying and some others that would have been better left alone. It has film mixed in with stage action more successfully than I have ever seen it before and it provides a handful of really excellent performances - especially by John Meillon, as the photographer, Vivian Pickles as the Princess, Glyn Owen, as a Cabinet Minister about to be without portfolio, Graham Crowden and Anton Rodgers as pillars of the old regime and Avril Elgar as the crazy suicide.

The play hangs together, hits its targets square, though not always fair, and provides a succession of laughs, some of them rather uncomfortable ones. It is one of Mr Osborne's best works. (Gerard Fay, The Guardian, 20th July, 1962)

The Blood of the Bambergs, a satire on a royal wedding, Mr Osborne has clearly written as a diversion from more serious work. At times, with its fatal accident, its resourceful colonel, and its substitute prince, it seems like a collaboration between Hope and Attigan. It is good fun, and leaves one with the impression (which one has always had about Mr Osborne) that in his secret being, unknown to himself, he regards royal personages, professional military men and the upper classes generally as having just about ten times as much sense, ability to handle a crisis, and survival capacity as Labour leaders, clergymen and the average rater. (Sunday Times, 22nd July, 1962)

### Under Plain Cover

Postman - Billy Russell  
Tim - Anton Rodgers  
Jenny - Ann Beach  
Stanley - Glyn Owen  
1st Reporter - Robert Eastgate  
2nd Reporter - Donald Troesden  
3rd Reporter - Robin Chapman  
4th Reporter - Tony Counter  
Bridegroom's Mother - Constance Lorne  
Bride's Mother - Avril Elgar  
Bridegroom's Father - James Cossins  
Bridegroom - John Maynard  
Bridegroom's Brother - Norman Allen

## Under Plain Cover (cont'd)

Bride's Father - Jimmy Gardner  
Waiter - Charles Lewson  
Guests - Barbara Keogh, Pauline Taylor

Directed by Jonathan Miller

Under Plain cover seems to be devoted to newspaper persecution and to a study of 'clothes fetishism'. It includes....a discussion on knickers: the trouble here is simply the feebleness of the dialogue.... There is no point in continuing the discussion except to ask what the council of the English Stage Company - which contains many distinguished names - found in these bits and pieces. Doubtless it considers that, in a land of free speech, a rebel should have his say. Personally I am rebellious about this kind of writing. But there it is; and historians twenty years on will say how much has survived. Time, as always, is the sovereign critic. (Illustrated London News, 4th August, 1962)

The second play, Under Plain Cover, tries very hard, but not very effectively, to administer shock. We are introduced to a young married couple who stimulate each other erotically by elaborate fetishism.

When not dressing up as Lord and Maid, Motor Cyclist and Bride, or Boxer and Girl Guide, they endear themselves to each other by exchanging endless dissertations on knickers (which they receive through the post Under Plain Cover in large quantities).

Their blissful way of life comes to an end when the press (villains of the piece and symbols of our way of life) discover that the happy fetishists are really brother and sister. The couple is pursued, exposed and separated, and their 'stories' are mercilessly bought and sold.

Mr Osborne's very personal message, which he might have sent with more clarity, wit and brevity, states that no one has the right to interfere with people's private lives. Jonathan Miller has directed with diligence and invention, and Alan Tagg's set makes its own harsh comment.

But the evening leaves one with a tragic feeling of a great talent brutally and wilfully squandered. (Robert Muller, Daily Mail, 20th July, 1962)

## INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE

First performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 9th September, 1964

Jones - John Quentin  
Bill Maitland - Nicol Williamson  
Hudson - Arthur Lowe  
Shirley - Ann Beach  
Joy - Lois Daine  
Mrs Garnsey - Clare Kelly  
Jane Maitland - Natasha Pyne  
Liz - Sheila Allen

Directed by Anthony Page

The successor to Jimmy Porter and Archie Rice is a middle-aged solicitor called Maitland, whose professional and private life is on the point of cracking up.

We see the full extent of his ruin in the first few minutes of the play - set in a nightmare courtroom with Maitland on trial for some nameless obscenity, struggling, white-faced and sweating to stammer out his defence, hunting desperately for his migraine pills and finally confessing that he has been expecting all his life to be found out.....

It is Mr Osborne's particular gift to make one respect characters which - by external description - sound worthless, and Maitland is no exception. In Nicol Williamson's magnificent performance - a power-house of perverse integrity - his collapse is a pitiful spectacle of human waste.

Much of his power derives from tirades in the well-known Osborne manner: onslaughts on the Modern Living fashion, TV Dons, and the Teenage girls "sure to marry an emergent African if she hasn't already sent her virginity to Oxfam".

In one sense, this material constitutes another phase in the author's love-hate relationship with Britain. But as it comes over it never seems that he is putting his own words into the character's mouth. Whatever his faults, Maitland is alive as a man - whether confusedly casting off conformist attitudes, holding on to his seedy business, or performing the routines of erotic betrayal in which he and his partners know all the danger signals and taboo phrases with sickening familiarity. ("I need you"; "look after yourself", etc)

Mr Osborne seems alone among current British playwrights in being able to create heroes of our own time. (The Times, 19th September, 1964)

It is a complex and subtle play, by no means easy to grasp at a single seeing; but a play of depth and weight and dignity, a profoundly felt attempt to get behind the fashionable theatrical obsession with identity and grapple with the much more important problem of existence itself.

In the writing is Mr Osborne's greatest advance yet, for it marries the effortless flow of the dialogue of Look Back in Anger with the questing questioning of Luther.

Occasionally, the author's greatest fault - writing too epigrammatically for a naturalistic scene - asserts itself, so that we hear of....."the Daily Express, where they're only allowed to say the word 'rape' if there are black Africans involved, or perhaps a nun."

But there is no doubt in my mind that it is Mr Osborne's best play to date, less ephemeral than Look Back in Anger, more original than The Entertainer, much more deeply felt than Luther. It says very clearly that he is continuing to develop and in a writer of Mr Osborne's stature that is the one thing that is absolutely vital. (Bernard Levin, Daily Mail, 10th September, 1964)

I do not believe that any language could be too sumptuous to convey the pity and the pathos and the wit and the comprehending compassion of Mr Osborne's work. Naturally

INADMISSABLE EVIDENCE (Cont'd)

you want to know which is Mr Osborne's best play. Go to the Royal Court and you will see it. You will see it, moreover, magnificently played in a production that Anthony Page has directed at a white heat of sympathy and understanding. (Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 13th September, 1964)

Some people might call this a soliloquy with lay figures rather than a drama in the classic sense. Certainly it makes very little use of dramatic surprise or curiosity. Before the end a feeling obtrudes that a bulldozer is being used where a trowel would have done. But there is a vital charge in the author's handling and even if the reading of the human predicament seems boorish or wrong-headed there is a fierce feeling for the pity that is in human relationships so that the evening 'works'. (Philip Hope-Wallace, The Guardian, 10th September, 1964)



## A PATRIOT FOR ME

First performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 30th June, 1965

Alfred Redl - Maximilian Schell  
August Siczynski - John Castle  
Steinbaver - Rio Fanning  
Kupfer - Frederick Jaeger  
Seconds - Lew Luton, Richard Morgan  
Privates - Tim Pearce, David Schurmann, Thick Wilson  
von Mohl - Clive Morton  
Adjutant - Timothy Carlton  
von Taussig - Edward Fox  
Albrecht - Sandor Eles  
Waiters at Anna's - Peter John, Donny Reiter  
Whores - Dona Martyn, Virginia Wetherell, Jackie Daryl  
Sandra Hampton  
Anna - Laurel Mather  
Hilde - Jennifer Jayne  
Stanitsin - Desmond Perry  
Oblensky - George Murcell  
von Hotzendorf - Sebastian Shaw  
Countess Delyanoff - Jill Bennett  
Lunz - Ferdy Mayne  
Cafe Waiters - Anthony Roy, Donny Reiter  
Group at Table - Dona Martyn, Laurel Mather, Bryn Bartlett,  
Cyril Wheeler  
Young Man in Cafe - Paul Robert  
Paul - Douglas Sheldon  
von Epp - George Devine  
Ferdie - John Forbes  
Figaro - Thick Wilson  
Kovacs - Hal Hamilton  
Marie-Antoinette - Lew Luton  
Tsarina - Donny Reiter  
Lady Godiva - Peter John  
Flunkey - David Schurmann  
Shepherdesses - Franco Derosa, Robert Kidd  
Dr Schoepfer - Vernon Dobtcheff  
Boy - Franco Derosa  
Viktor Jerzabek - Tim Pearce  
Hotel Waiters - Bryn Bartlett, Lew Luton  
Orderly - Richard Morgan  
Lipschutz - David Schurmann  
Mitzi Heigel - Virginia Wetherell  
Minister - Anthony Roye  
Deputies - Clive Morton, George Devine, Vernon Dobtcheff  
Cyril Wheeler

Directed by Anthony Page

Mr Osborne's play deals with a subject of tragic grandeur that is also, to the British people at this moment, of topical importance. There is in the .... programme an enthusiastic eulogy of the old Imperial Austro-Hungarian army as a practical realisation of international solidarity, and of the equality of men under the Emperor, as all men are said to be equal in the eyes of God. Presumably this note was written by Mr Osborne himself. I read it with some reserve because I suspected it of being a trap. I remember that after a page of rapturous praise of Robespierre's self abnegation Lord Acton unexpectedly remarked, 'Thus perished the most hateful character in European history since Machiavelli reduced into a code the wickedness of public men'. So when the curtain went up at the Royal Court I was prepared for the play itself to give the absolute lie to the programme.

## A PATRIOT FOR ME (Cont'd)

It does nothing of the kind. In it the Imperial army promotes the well born and incompetent; but it promotes also the competent whether they are well born or ill. Lieutenant Redl has no advantages except his outstanding ability. This ability is quickly rated by these in authority, and the Imperial Army is to Redl an affectionate and admiring parent and a generous patron.

Yet Mr Osborne sees in imperial destiny a tragic fatality. It is a fatality that, when the time of decadence approaches, leads an Imperial Power to reject, for one reason or another, those who might have served it well. (Harold Hobson, The Sunday Times, 4th July, 1965)

This ramshackle, top-heavy and profoundly unsatisfying play was banned by His Serene Noodleship, the Lord Chamberlain, so I suppose - in case, unlikely though it is, anyone still takes Lord Cobbold seriously - I had better point out that it is an entirely proper and unsuggestive work, with nothing in it that any but the immeasurably dirty minded or illiterate could take exception to.

But it is still a ramshackle, top-heavy and profoundly unsatisfying play. (Bernard Levin, Daily Mail, 1st July, 1965)

Redl, a Jew, a brilliant officer, a homosexual, sold out to Russian spies various military secrets which influenced the course of the First World War. But in treating the theme Osborne has put it on a different plane, visually and verbally. He seems unable to avoid the traps of trying to say too much in the time available to a dramatist, but more than in any of his other plays he has made each scene, if it could be regarded as self-contained, a miniature drama. It has always been clear that he has a special magic which he can apply to dramatic vocabulary. He has lacked discipline in the working of his magic - but in A Patriot for Me he gets near enough to working his spell over the whole story. He has done nothing better as pure drama..... (Gerard Fay, The Guardian, 1st July, 1965)

## SUICIDE OF AN AUSTRIAN OFFICER - The Sale of Military Secrets (From a Correspondent)                      Vienna May 29

The suicide of Colonel Alfred Redl, one of the best known officers of the General Staff Corps, in a Vienna hotel last Sunday has been explained in a sensational manner today. In official quarters it is stated that Colonel Redl fell into severe financial difficulties through his manner of life and was in great want when he entered into relations with a foreign power and sold important military secrets. On the discovery of his crime he was called to Vienna, where four officers of the General Staff sought him out. On their leaving him, the Colonel, who was only 40 years of age, committed suicide with a Browning pistol that the officers left in his room.

The case has caused much excitement among the public and depression in military circles. No one thought that Colonel Redl, head of the anti-espionage service, would turn out to be a spy himself. The Nevres Wiener Tagblatt says that Colonel Redl was in the service of Russia for 14 years, and, among other things, had sold the plans for the co-operation of the Austro-Hungarian and German Armies to Russia. He received over 100,000 Kronen for his secrets. (The Times, 30th May, 1913)



## A BOND HONOURED

First performance at the National Theatre (The Old Vic) 6th June, 1966

Dioniso - Michael Byrne  
Berlebeyo - Graham Crowden  
Gerando - Paul Curran  
Lidora - Janina Faye  
Tizon - Gerald James  
Marcela - Maggie Smith  
Leonido - Robert Stephens  
Maid - Chloe Ashcroft  
Zulema - Neil Fitzpatrick  
Zarrabulli - John Hallam  
Shepherd - Frank Wylie

Directed by John Dexter

John Osborne has commented angrily on the generally unfavourable reception of his new play, A Bond Honoured. The director, John Dexter, suggests critics should be made to see plays twice before they comment. I am willing to see the play again but I suspect my second opinion is unlikely to differ radically from the first. I rose from my seat disappointed and sulky.....

What depressed me was the ordinariness of the language. Expressed in the prosaic sentences of a tourist phrasebook, acts that are shocking become tiresome; the search for identity turns into a vague complaint against having been conceived in the first place. Only in the scenes where Leonido ... confronts the Moor ... and later the Shepherd ... did a metaphysical argument begin to take shape. Occasionally the hero describes his state of mind in a few shrewd words and I longed for the play to take wing at these points - for if any English playwright can make eschatological questions dramatic it is the author of Inadmissible Evidence. Perhaps my sulk reduces to a regret that Mr Osborne did not adapt the original text more boldly. (Jeremy Kingston, Punch, 5th June, 1966)

We first heard of John Osborne's adaptation of Lope de Vega's La Fianza Satisfecha in the opening announcements of the National Theatre, and now that it has finally reached the stage its moment seems to have gone. When a play has waited some 350 years for a revival (for much of that time not even available as a text in its own country) one might suppose that a year or two more would make no difference. But the Osborne version has evidently been prepared for a particular place and time and it arrives too late. (The Times, 2nd June, 1966)

Out of the conventions of sixteenth century Spanish drama.....John Osborne has hewn in A Bond Honoured the perfect Osborne hero. Using the bare open courtyard of the Madrid carrales, the anonymous space which could represent at once Europe, the World, heaven and hell, he sets before us the pure human rebel; a protagonist who, liberated from plot and proscenium, carves himself out of eternity. On this stage, freed from the determinism of settings, relationships, alteration by events, he can pursue untrammelled, statically himself, the essential Osborne dialogue; with his nature, the audience, with God and history.

For devotees of Osborne's work, it must be an exciting moment in his development. For others, there will remain two questions to be settled. First, whether this clarification of his talent is not a step away from drama, in the direction of Faust, Browning's monologues and Byron's Cain. And second, whether the result justifies his cannibalising as new material for his statue the work of a dead, classic playwright.

For there seems no point in concealing that, to produce A Bond Honoured, Osborne has pretty well demolished the obscure old play by Lope de Vega on which it is based. La Fianza Satisfecha belongs to a large Spanish genre of exemplary romances in which outrageous and blasphemous villains are brought miraculously to God, the extremity of their conversion demonstrating the infinite power and mercy of Deity. Lope's Leonido strikes a priest, blinds his father, and boasts that he has lusted after his own mother and sister. But fate preserves him from transgressing so far beyond divine redemption and in a miraculous meeting with the Christ he is converted from the scourge of God to God's scourge of the heathen....

Osborne brings the play much closer to Lope's contemporaries, Marlowe and the Jacobean, by removing the heavenly bridle on Leonido's desires...

Evidently, Osborne's intention is to modernize the play's shocks by having Leonido enact the desire of the Freudian id. But it goes beyond that. Turning Lope's moral inside out, he makes the Christ-apparition confess that Leonido's account with heaven is overdrawn irredeemably. His final crucifixion becomes an act of humanist defiance. Having explored his nature beyond the Christian bounds, Leonido takes responsibility for his own debts. No one else will be crucified for his sins.

In the existentialist morality Osborne has re-tailored from his original, the exaggerated outrages make a kind of sense. Their preposterousness relegates the plot to dream-like implausibility, part of the fantasy of the Promethean figure in the foreground. The only question is whether it shouldn't have been better for Osborne to discard Lope entirely and fashion his own starker, more subjective fable. (Ronald Bryden, The Observer, 12th June, 1966)

## TIME PRESENT

First performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 23rd May, 1968

Edith - Valerie Taylor  
Pauline - Sarah Taunton  
Constance - Katharine Blake  
Pamela - Jill Bennett  
Murray - Geoffrey Frederick  
Edward - Tom Adams  
Abigail - Kika Markham  
Bernard - Harry Landis

Directed by Anthony Page

In this play, Osborne creates his first long female role, a complex, dissatisfied unhappy woman, frequently irritating, occasionally boring and occasionally - despite the obsession with style - cheaply abusive. I have heard complaints that the play is static and in a sense this is true. The drama is almost Classical Greek in its placing of passionate action - love, death - off the stage. But the activity inside Pamela's mind is action sufficient for a play. There were moments when I became restless in my seat because the dialogue appeared to have the wandering quality of leisurely conversation. Anthony Page's direction represents this surface quality deceptively well but the apparent meandering is deliberate. What Osborne has successfully managed to do is use the traditional form of a conversation piece to show the distress of a woman whose capacity to love, already chilling, is about to freeze solid. (Jeremy Kingston, Punch, 5th June, 1968)

John Osborne's new play... takes him one step beyond Inadmissible Evidence on the road that leads from angry young man to a dyspeptic and surprisingly conservative middle age. Building his play around a woman for the first time, he has created in the actress, Pamela, a searing, marvellous, all-enveloping character who first dominates the action, such as it is and then rises clear above it leaving one with a vivid memory of her but not much recollection of the play. Offstage, we learn, Pamela's father (an actor-manager in the Wolfitt tradition) is dying; with his death she sees not only the end of him but of an entire gracious dignified way of life that has disappeared before her eyes into a cloud of spotty hippies and younger, more committed but worse still more successful actresses. She has a vicious dislike of the present and a healthy fear of the future: "Stride into the '70's? I haven't got used to hobbling about in the '60's yet".

Pamela's strength, whether in her acid tirades or her almost petulant self pity, makes this more than any earlier Osborne a play about the nature of middle-age; there is still something of the fury of Jimmy Porter about Pamela, but there is also the suggestion that the rebel of the fifties finds it impossible to come to terms with the rebels of the sixties - that Osborne has lost touch with the protest of his youth. The events of the play and the other characters only really exist to provoke a reaction from Pamela, and she in turn only really comes to life when there is something or somebody to hate; like other leading Osborne characters before her, she attacks what she is against without always being entirely sure what she is for. There is something terribly jaundiced about her, and about her vitriolic attacks on critics and drug addicts who seem to rate about equally on her scale of non-values; yet as played by Jill Bennett in what is surely the best performance by an actress this year, one can never entirely lose sympathy with her nor cease to feel that there is about Pamela something infinitely attractive. (The Tatler, July, 1968)

## THE HOTEL IN AMSTERDAM

First performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 3rd July, 1968

Porter - Anthony Douse

Gus - Joss Ackland

Laurie - Paul Schofield

Margaret - Isabel Dean

Annie - Judy Parfitt

Amy - Susan Engel

Dan - David Burke

Waiter - Ralph Watson

Gillian - Claire Davidson

Directed by Anthony Page

I can think of no other playwright, living or dead who has earned the privileges that Osborne now enjoys with the British theatre going public. In a sense it does not matter whether his plays are good or bad. Because the work comes from him, audiences will put up with clumsy exposition, weak plotting, muddled argument, and stages of invertebrate yes-men dancing attendance on a megalomaniac hero. What matters is the posture that Osborne is adopting; who figures on his latest list of enemies, what form his negative patriotism will take this time.

To this extent he holds the public less as a dramatist than as a popular preacher. He is a man, who, more than once, has put their feelings into words.....

It is the memory of Jimmy Porter and Henry [sic] Maitland that brings audiences back to his work hoping that the same thing will happen again: that another unrepentant egoist will step forward and compel them to acknowledge their own kinship with that scornful, fault-ridden, challenging face. Ugly as they may be, Osborne's heroes are living creatures raising their voices to wake the dead....

If you associate Laurie with his creator, and it is hard not to, the future looks rather bleak. The play is confined to a tiny world of homosexual jokes and show business gossip; and even without Laurie's confessions of waning power, it sags with a sense of exhaustion. Osborne's strengths have always been his intuitive access to heroes whose private predicament touched a public nerve; and the boiling energy with which he made that connexion. I only hope that the recuperative interval in Amsterdam has been more useful to him than it is to his hero.

(Irving Wardle, The Times, 6th July, 1968)

I missed the pleasure of anticipation which I believe an essential ingredient in this kind of drama but the articulate pungent self expression of the hero Laurie - essentially again this play seems like a monologue of disaster and accidia, with a hovering cluster of listeners - demands attention. It is not facile or trite, though the style permits Mr Osborne for instance to take time off for perfectly gratuitous smoking room stories, or a chestnut about a nun in a closed order. The sarcasms bite. But the jokes, about sanitary towels and so on which set a good part of the audience in a roar, are not everyone's cue for laughter.

(Philip Hope-Wallace, The Guardian, 4th July, 1968)

Let me say at once that this is John Osborne's most satisfying play. Through the years I have been antipathetic to his work. While recognizing his talent for dialogue, only occasional passages have stirred me. Now I surrender. The Hotel in Amsterdam lights the imagination and not simply because of Schofield, though it is hard to think of another actor in the part. Schofield enforces concentration. Nobody on our stage could do more with the second act love scene, which itself is as true as anything Osborne has conceived. The words are fastidiously chosen, and Schofield gives the right weight and unexpectedness. When we listen to him we are indeed listening. (J C Trewin, Illustrated London News, 13th July, 1968)



## WEST OF SUEZ

First performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 17th August, 1971

Wyatt Gillman - Ralph Richardson  
Frederica - Jill Bennett  
Robin - Patricia Lawrence  
Evangie - Sheila Ballantine  
Mary - Penelope Wilson  
Edward - Geoffrey Palmer  
Robert - Frank Wylie  
Patrick - Willoughby Gray  
Christopher - Nigel Hawthorne  
Owen Lamb - Nicholas Selby  
Alastair Anthony Gardner  
Harry - Peter Carlisle  
Mrs James - Sheila Burrell  
Leroi - Paul Neunie  
Mr Dekker - John Bloomfield  
Mrs Dekker - Bessie Love  
Jed - Jeffrey Shankley  
Islanders - Leon Berton, Montgomery Matthew

Directed by Anthony Page

A clutch of whites on a Carribean Island, formerly British, now independent, provides a melancholy microcosm, not so much of declining Empire as of Western civilisation. Most of them are members of the family of Wyatt Gillman, an elderly middling sort of writer turned television sage, himself from a military Empire-shoring background, his four daughters, three with husbands, variously involved with science, literature, teaching and bolt-hole domesticity. Their lives are all empty; so are those of the old man's secretary, of an elderly, dying American engineer, a mincing young hair-dresser, an Etonian best-selling novelist. Each in turn offers some aspect of inertia, resigned, ashamed, reflexively spiteful.

Their precarious no-man's-land is threatened by a blundering, amiable, insensitive America in the shape of tourists; by quite another America, a young yippie loosing off a stream of four-letter invective (alongside which - did Osborne ruefully reflect? - Jimmy Porter's tirades in Look Back in Anger sound like the measured reproaches of a candid friend) before lapsing into sulky impotence; finally by the Third World, shadowing the whole play in the person of a sullen manservant, carving a menacing slice out of the second act with the arrival of a beady woman journalist, at last bursting in with animal cries and a spatter of gleeful gunfire.

Within this framework... Anthony Page has directed a uniformly admirable cast... through the patterned exchanges of spite and kindness, of bitterness and elegy, of instinctive understanding and brusque, illiberal impatience so that they play like a skilful orchestra against and around the central statement - Ralph Richardson's towering portrait of spiritual exhaustion. (S W Lambert, The Sunday Times, 22nd Aug, 1971)

Frederica's husband is a pathologist - 'a blood and shit' man he calls himself, and the image frames John Osborne's new play, standing for an ugly reality, a pressure to face a new order, which his central characters and their situation do not know or care to know.....

Beneath the leisured boredom of their enclave of retreating colonialism, there are ominous rumbles: the young black servant is sullen, a young, silent American comes, observes, talks only off stage and then only to the pathologist, until finally he bursts out into a denunciatory blood-and-shit speech of his own. And within the classical span of the day, the climax; in a short final scene the black man, armed and uniformed, bursts in and guns down the writer. Osborne's final line presumably gives us the best clue to his position. 'An English saying you probably wouldn't

know,' says one character, 'My God, they've shot the fox'. Ironically used, it seems to be both an acceptance of the absurdity of the old ethos, yet a restrained cry against a new philistinism. One of the set pieces of the second act, the writer being interviewed by a crudely aggressive woman from the island newspaper and retaliating mostly with facetiousness, the self-deprecating banter of the stiff-upper classes, seems to point in the same direction.

Yet the old man is not unkindly drawn. He is indeed, the only fully drawn character in the play, and he gets much of Osborne's familiar sharpness of phrase which here as ever gives us continual felicities. And, of course, the part might have been created for Ralph Richardson who has now perfected just this sort of old man. (Peter Fiddick, The Guardian, 18th August, 1971)

West of Suez is, ultimately, Osborne's most depressing play; even the Colonel in Look Back in Anger had more going for him than is ultimately allowed Wyatt Gillman, suspended in time and space like an articulate scarecrow attempting to come to terms with the future even while it is killing him. (Sheridan Morley, The Tatler, October, 1971)

## HEDDA GABLER

First performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 28th June, 1972

Tesman - Ronald Hines

Hedda - Jill Bennet

Thea - Barbara Ferris

Judge Brack - Denholm Elliot

Eilert Lovborg - Brian Cox

Directed by Anthony Page

'A great and largely misused play', says John Osborne of Hedda Gabler and even if his new adaptation of it ... doesn't solve all the problems it poses, it certainly commands respect. Without distorting or vulgarising Ibsen, the dialogue contains some splendid chips-off-the-old Osborne; the scholarly Tesman is, for instance, accused by Hedda of 'snorting around in libraries', on their honeymoon, Hedda and Tesman "get embroiled with those relentless tourists" and Tesman claims he could never ask his wife to settle for a 'petty bourgeois cottage'.

But although Osborne's dialogue has a hammer-blow pungency, I'm less sure about the interpretation he and the director...have given to the play. To Osborne, Hedda's tragedy is that she was born bored; that she had a fierce hunger for life stifled partly by her own upper class background. We should see her beating her wings against her imprisoning domestic cage; but in this rather muted production her overpowering frustration is replaced by a well-bred lassitude.....

It's a production full of intelligent insights: where it errs is in sacrificing Ibsen's surface tension to detailed character analysis and in projecting Hedda's inertia as the mainspring of her personality. Admittedly she's a woman who pulls back when she comes to a high and difficult fence; but you've got to believe, as you rarely do here, that she would have approached the fence in the first place. (Michael Billington, The Guardian, 29th June, 1972)



## A SENSE OF DETACHMENT

First performance at the Royal Court Theatre, 4th December, 1972

Chairman - Nigel Hawthorne  
Chap - John Standing  
Girl - Denise Coffey  
Older Lady - Rachel Kempson  
Father - Hugh Hastings  
Grandfather - Ralph Michael  
Shifting Planted Interrupter - Terence Frisby  
Shifting Planted Interrupter's Wife - Jeni Barnett  
Man in Stage Box - David Hill  
Stage Manager - Peter Jolley

Directed by Frank Dunlop

We were not a very good audience last night. And indeed, Mr Osborne clearly expected no better of us since he planted a couple of spokesmen out front to raise our discontents.....

They had plenty to grouse about. 'Get on with it', they shout. 'I've got a train to catch', 'rubbish', 'We don't know who these people are, what they're doing, where they are or anything'.

But the cast give as much punishment as they take: no sooner has Terence Frisby spoken up for the playgoers of Surrey than someone on stage has dismissed him as an overworked theatrical device.

The word 'device' rings through the evening like a death-bell. As soon as any idea shows any sign of getting started, somebody will shoot it down as a cliché. The feeling is that Osborne, having set himself the task of covering the two hour distance, found himself sinking into the bog of platitude at every step. So he remains on the farther shore of the first page; with a cast of unnamed, unlocalised figures inhabiting an eventless limbo where the writer has not yet run the risk of making mistakes by sketching a character or a situation with consequences.  
(Irving Wardle, The Times, 5th December, 1972)

## THE END OF ME OLD CIGAR

First performance at the Greenwich Theatre, 16th January, 1975

Lady Regina Frimley - Rachel Roberts  
Stan - Neil Johnston  
Wain - Toby Salaman  
Stella Shrift - Sheila Ballantine  
Letitia Pangbourne - Angela Galbraith  
Mrs Isobel Sands - Jill Bennett  
Lady Gwen Mitchelson - Jasmina Hilton  
Jog Fienberg - Marty Cruickshank  
Rachel, the Countess of Bleak - Joanna Lumley  
Leonard Grimethorpe - Keith Barron  
Smash Deel - Roderic Leigh  
Frederick Black - Dan Milton  
Stratford West - Kenneth Macgarvie  
John Stewkes, MP - Charles Kinross  
Ashley Withers - John Grillo  
Robert Bigley - Mike Lucas

Directed by Max Stafford Clark

If, one of these days, John Osborne succumbs to the temptation of writing a play about a man haunted by his past, he will be able to do so from the depths of personal experience.

His early plays, with their shrill tirades of denunciation, attracted almost religious devotion, as well as opposition. As soon as the 'angry' label had been securely attached to him, general acceptance followed. It is reassuring to confine an author to a convenient pigeon-hole: rather like certifying him insane and putting him away in a well-guarded institution. Just as long as he doesn't roam about free among us.

To judge by the dismissive reactions to his latest play....., it becomes evident that his critics have not realised - or, more likely, are unwilling to accept - that Osborne has not been 'angry' for something like 10 years. In short he has matured. (Frank Marcus, The Sunday Telegraph, 26th January, 1975)

For so bad a joke, John Osborne's The End of Me Old Cigar... is surprisingly unboring. I agree, it does build up, and ponderously, to an awful let down. But a firework display of quips in normally sputtering and flashing and keeping us amused.

The delightful Rachel Roberts dominates as a loquacious widow of wealth, a man-hater who has been running her mansion as a high-class brothel for VIP's complete with two-way mirrors and enough microphones, we are told, to make Watergate seem like three-day cricket.

Her plan, she confides to her girls, is to depose The Men by disclosing the contents of thousands of miles of film.....

But the play's own pretension to a target is neatly removed when Jill Bennett and Keith Barron share a long inconsequential love-scene which, when not naughtily scabrous, turns winsome and embarrassing. The pair are much obsessed, it seems unnecessarily, with their sexual capabilities. A trick ending, depriving the widow of her precious records and we go home.

At odd moments, the comedy hints at the impudent frivol in the Restoration style. Its sentimentality defeats the outrageous wit, and Osborne over-indulges his propensity to fill the stage with nobodies.

(John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 17th January, 1975)

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

First performance at The Greenwich Theatre, 13th February, 1975

Dorian Gray - Michael Kitchen  
Sybil Vane - Angharad Rees  
Basil Hallward - John McEnery  
Lord Henry Wotton - Anton Rogers  
Lord Fermor - Kenneth Benda  
Lady Agatha - Kitty Fitzgerald  
Duchess of Harley - Anne Blake  
Sir Thomas Burdon - Lloyd Lamble  
Mrs Vane - Jean Heywood  
James Vane - Paul Kelly  
Victor - Michael Deacon  
Mr Hubbard - Lloyd Lamble  
Francis - Kenneth Benda  
Alan Campbell - Michael Deacon  
Duchess of Monmouth - Angharad Rees  
Footmen and Policemen - John Daniell, Iain Roberts

Directed by Clive Donner

I feel sorry for John Osborne. He has done an excellent adaptation of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray which reads wittily and thrillingly on the printed page. But Clive Donner's lack-lustre Greenwich production is as slow as a century by Lawry and manages to tone-down, almost to the point of invisibility, the play's unashamedly dramatic effects. The result is a fatal lack of style and panache.

It is a pity because Osborne has, I think, done much more than a scissors-and-paste job on Wilde's famous story of the corruption of a beautiful young man by sensual indulgence and moral indifference. He has thinned out the over abundant epigrams, he has highlighted the topical concept of youth as a commodity for which one would sell one's soul and he has, in Turn of the Screw fashion, created a sense of evil through implication. Where Wilde goes on for page after sickly page about the details of Dorian's corruption (even down to his appearance in drag as Anne de Joyeuse in a pearl encrusted gown), Osborne conveys moral disintegration through the gradual breakdown of the hero's language into terse, broken phrases and through a creeping phantasmagoria.

What Mr Donner gives us, however, is neither Yellow Book melodrama nor real explanation of character; it seems typical of his approach that where Osborne tells us Basil Hallward, the painter, sinks on to the sofa with a look of pain after Dorian's abduction by the Mephistophelian Henry Wotton, in this version he merely shrugs his shoulders. And even when Osborne gives Dorian a marvellous speech full of terror and nightmare disorder, Michael Kitchen delivers it with all the unbuckled passion of someone reading out instructions from a Boy Scout manual. (Michael Billington, The Guardian, 14th February, 1975)

What is so interesting about John Osborne's adaptation... is that he has found in Oscar Wilde's macabre morality a velveteen barouche for his own favourite themes.

It keeps faithfully, even lovingly to the story.

The young man retains his youth and beauty while the marks that corruption (and the years) should have etched on his face are visible only in the portrait painted by one of his lovers.

Guided by the wicked Lord Henry, a witty cynic who mocks marriage, the Church and the family, the divinely handsome Dorian believes that his highest duty is simply to realise his own nature, even though it leads him to the depths of degradation.

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY (cont'd)

Thus he becomes a second cousin to Maitland in Inadmissible Evidence and other Osborne heroes. Having alienated himself from the society he derides, he has to pick up a bill of remorse he cannot possibly pay.

Osborne fakes none of the greenery-yallery vulgarity of the fabulous story and conveys much of its fascination. (John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 14th February, 1975)

## WATCH IT COME DOWN

First performance at The National Theatre (The Old Vic), 24th February, 1976

Sally Prosser - Jill Bennett  
Ben Prosser - Frank Finlay  
Raymond - Michael Feast  
Glen - Michael Gough  
Shirley - Angela Galbraith  
Jo - Susan Fleetwood  
Marion - Rowena Cooper  
Dr Ashton - Peter Needham

Directed by Bill Bryden

John Osborne's Watch It Come Down is another attempt to rewrite Heartbreak House: a study of a doomed fractious intelligentsia undermined both by its own sense of futility and by a collapsing society. But whereas Shaw, as befits an Irish playwright, managed to put more of England on the stage than one would have thought possible, Osborne concentrates on such a thin, narrow strip of society that his apocalyptic finale lacks resonance. The play shows all Osborne's talent for casual insult and for probing the scars and sores of a bad marriage; but at the end one feels it is the Old Vic set rather than England that is being irrevocably shattered to fragments.....

In short, the play is an infuriating blend of the best and worst of Osborne: on the one hand, full of bilious wit (particularly about the English countryside) and shameless emotion and on the other technically gauche (one death, one suicide and one serious injury in the last five minutes) and intellectually muddled..... And although Bryden's production cannot disguise the bathos of some of the dialogue it brings off some notable Drury Lane melodrama effects such as the passing of a clankingly believable goods train. (Michael Billington, The Guardian, 25th February, 1976)

Osborne still writes with the virility of a sledge-hammer, but this time his characters are overwhelmed by his urgency and profligacy. When finally they slip over the literary precipice into Shavian symbolism, the effect is almost comic when it ought to be awesome. Bill Bryden's astute direction cannot pump credibility into characters who are forever peering into their own navels to discover the mystery of the universe. (Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 25th February, 1976)

Watch It Come Down offers both plot and pattern. Neither is fully developed and the chances are that they throttle each other. Virtually nothing is made of the railway setting; one assumes that it represents a desperate nostalgia which Sally ascribes to Ben, but which occasionally gathers over the play like a cloud without much reference to character. Outside the station lies a hostile world; the Prossers are hated by their neighbours, who employ 'yobboes' first to kill Ben's dog, then to attack the place.

Mr Osborne has no charity for the present, but he has plenty of bile to spare for the sawn-off segment of the past living on the right side of the tracks. There is generalised approval for wise, doomed, honourable Glen and for all-loving Jo, but more specific attitudes are vitriolic. The main focus is the marriage of Ben and Sally, a running sore. Their battles are the play's most immediate source of life. It seems that they are faking a separation, to see what effect it will have on the rest of the menage, but this idea is not pursued. Glen duly expires, and Jo throws herself under the precipitate goods, though whether in despair at the death of love or the persistence of hate is unclear. (Robert Cushman, The Observer, 29th February, 1976)



## A SUBJECT OF SCANDAL AND CONCERN

Broadcast by BBC TV on 6th November, 1960

Narrator - John Freeman  
George Holyoake - Richard Burton  
Mrs Holyoake - Rachel Roberts  
Chairman - George Howe  
Maitland - Colin Douglas  
Mrs Holyoake's Sister - Hope Jockman  
Brother-in-Law - Hamish Roughton  
Mr Bubb - Donald Eccles  
Chairman of the Magistrates - Willoughby Goddard  
Captain Lefroy - David C Browning  
Mr Pinching - John Ruddock  
Captain Mason - Ian Ainsley  
Mr Cooper - Robert Cawdron  
Mr Jones - Charles Carson  
Jailer - John Dearth  
Clerk to the Assizes - William Devlin  
Mr Justice Erskine - George Devine  
Mr Alexander - Nicholas Meredith  
Mr Bartrem - Nigel Davenport  
Chaplain - Andrew Keir

Directed by Tony Richardson

The name of Mr John Osborne attached to last night's BBC TV play A Subject of Scandal and Concern suggested we should prepare for something out of the ordinary, but few of us can have expected anything quite so extraordinary as the way in which it was presented.

First, we had an assurance that the play was put on so late because it was unsuitable for children (quite untrue as it happened since subject and treatment were irresistibly suggestive of a school broadcast), then Mr John Freeman appeared sitting awkwardly and with every sign of discomfort in front of the camera, to tell us haltingly that we were not in for anything unusual or disturbing and that we should not worry because he would be standing by to fill in necessary information and ease our way for us....

That this told-to-children style was not dropped then and there is strange enough but how can one possibly explain the fantastic lengths to which it was carried in the next hour? Mr Freeman was on the screen at the end of almost every scene, underlining and repeating points, adding stage directions, providing a 'and now children, teacher will lead a group discussion' tailpiece and generally bringing the play down with a crash whenever it showed signs of getting airborne, sublimely regardless of the fact that it would have made perfect sense without these interventions, awkwardly inserted live (as an afterthought?) into a recorded production. (The Times, 7th November, 1960)

## THE RIGHT PROSPECTUS

Broadcast by BBC TV on 22nd October, 1970

Newbold - George Cole  
Mrs Newbold - Elvi Hale

Directed by Alan Cooke

John Osborne's new play.... opened with immensely promising and tantalizing possibilities: one of those delightful fantasy situations in which the most extraordinary events are thrust into the most ordinary situations - and nobody bats an eyelid.

On this occasion, none showed the least surprise when a middle aged, married couple enrolled as pupils at a boys minor public school....

After a finger-tip exploration of the attractions of returning to school, taking along all the trappings of middle aged, middle class comfort - Scotch and cigars in the study or alternatively lacey underwear and snug reading in bed - he made no attempt to explode the widely accepted myth, and show how truly appalling it would really be to go back to the best regimented days of our lives.

In rapid succession he aimed petulant slaps in the general direction of the technological revolution, democracy, protest marches, tradition, co-education, public schools and a host of other subjects which cropped up too fast to memorize. Or perhaps that is unfair to him: rather his characters were called upon to mouth such criticisms.

But no single subject emerged as paramount; instead the actors were called upon to pronounce the essentially inconsequential in tones of great consequence, leaping from subject to subject leaving resultant impression of a flicker book with the pages transposed and half of them missing. (Chris Dunkley, The Times, 23rd October, 1970)



MS or JILL AND JACK

Broadcast by Yorkshire Television on 11th September, 1974

Wilfred - Stanley Lebor

Jill - Jill Bennett

Jerry - Denis Lawson

Mary - Wendy Gifford

Jack - John Standing

Mark - Michael Byrne

Girl - Alison Mead

Waiter - Alan Bowlas

Directed by Mike Newell

Sexual warfare remains John Osborne's primary source of invention and few playwrights have fought it over so variegated a field. He is unrivalled, save perhaps by Amis and Albee, in the vitality with which he invests the figure of the male bitch (The Hotel in Amsterdam); much less successful, but no less in thrall to, the mannish lady (A Patriot for Me); in West of Suez he matched these two figures evenly for the first time in the marvellous dialogue of a wife who could only attack and a husband who defended himself with every mean trick in the book.

MS or Jill and Jack was lighter and slighter than any of these, a 35 minute pastiche of conventional romantic comedy reversed to the point where the sex war is over and emasculation complete. Mr Osborne hedged his bets slightly (and made us want to know more) by making Mark an old softie, Mary a glittering Crush Bar tough and the 'feminine' hero himself an out of work actor and therefore reasonably inclined to excessive anxieties and titivation in the first place; but this little play was one of the coolest things he has done, ironic and sexy with its proportions and weight judged to perfection. (Michael Ratcliffe, The Times, 12th September, 1974)

## THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

Broadcast by Yorkshire Television on 24th September, 1974

Jocelyn Broom - Alec Guinness

Bill Wakely - Michael Gough

Madge Wakely - Sarah Badel

Directed by Mike Newell

The Gift of Friendship was an hour long play about writing and what happens when the writing comes to a stop. John Osborne has already suggested the subject.....A Sense of Detachment offered an evening in which the subject of creative impotence was written into the structure and the substance of the piece itself: the audience was dared to answer back and, despite the presence of a scripted barracker, actually did so on occasion. There is only one way to resist the unacceptable on the box, apart from stoving in the tube, and that is to switch off, so Mr Osborne was careful first of all to make The Gift of Friendship a genuine dramatic reckoning between two sharply defined characters, the distinguished Jocelyn and his contemporary once-chum and fellow writer Bill Wakely.....

There was some confusing stuff about the seven deadly sins and some precipitate cutting, but these did nothing to obscure the main theme which rang out murderously clear: that all writers, forced to ignore the present and future in order to batten on the past, are utterly alone; or the secondary one that England has been destroyed out of sheer stupidity and idleness. 'I think we're giving away a lot, don't you?', remarked Jocelyn over the after-dinner port, and Wakely agreed with a suitably long face. The grimmest irony of all was that, since they were both merely writers, there wasn't a thing either of them was going to do about it.

(Michael Ratcliffe, The Times, 25th September, 1974)

YOU'RE NOT WATCHING ME MUMMY

Broadcast by Yorkshire Television on 21st January, 1980

Jemima - Anna Massey  
Leslie - Peter Sallis

Is John Osborne still a major dramatist? Is he, for the time being, a dramatist at all? Sadly, those who stay in on Sunday night to see You're Not Watching Me Mummy may feel that the second question is more apposite than the first.

They may on the other hand conclude that he is now a moderately accomplished TV writer, since this new work possesses some fashionable attributes.... Contemporary Britain is despatched by means of jaundiced generalizations delivered on behalf of the author. There is an underlying thread of pathos....

But boring the audience is no way to dramatize boredom, and crude, carelessly constructed dialogue is not the way to present an existence devoid of dignity. It may have been the direction as well as the writing but I found this play excruciating on the ear. Much of the language bandied about is of the kind which used to be called 'basic' but which now sounds pathetically dated.  
(Michael Church, The Times, 19th January, 1980)

Actresses have had enough to put up with this week from John Osborne's You're Not Watching Me Mummy. This was a berserk windmilling attack on - well, you couldn't say theatre. The kind of thing that happened in theatrical dressing rooms, perhaps. That was what was shown. The savagely disappointing thing is that one could have made it up oneself. (Russell Davies, The Sunday Times, 27th January, 1980)